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AUGUST, 1958

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Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine

AUGUST, 1958

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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE is published every month on the Friday nearest to the 22nd of the month preceding the month of issue i.e., the September issue will be published on Friday, 22nd August. Why not become a regular subscriber and thus ensure that you do not miss an issue of this grand magazine? Hand your subscription to your newsagent, bookseller or bookstall.

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EQMM's DETECTIVE DIRECTORY

UNREASONABLE DOUBT

by **ELIZABETH FERRARS**
(COLLINS, 10/6)

Elizabeth Ferrars uses her familiar English suburban and country background and characters; and gives the whole thing a shot in the arm by setting the murder in a villa near Monte Carlo. There is plenty of tension, not too much conversation and one or two nice nutty characters.
LEO HARRIS in *Books and Bookmen*.

DEAD MAN'S SHOES

by **LEO BRUCE**
(PETER DAVIES, 13/6)

Carolus Deene, the history-master detective, is tipped off by a sceptical pupil ("I suppose it was Chastotte Corday, Sir?") into investigating an ingenious shipboard murder case. Varied characterisation includes a comic lecherous gamekeeper. Will entertain those who like plenty of niggers with their murder.
MAURICE RICHARDSON in *Sunday Observer*.

THE MAN IN MY GRAVE

by **WILSON TUCKER**
(MACDONALD, 10/6)

Lightly written frolic among the tombstones of a hick town in the Middle West: the meek little investigator is winner of a card.
CHRISTOPHER PYM (*Spectator*).

THE TASTE OF ASHES

by **HOWARD BROWNE**
(COLLANCZ, 12/6)

We have met the characters before: tough but generous private eye, family that runs everything from Press to police force in Olympic Heights. Mr. Browne has a genuinely original turn of phrase and felicitous invention, like the police force in which the lieutenant is a B.A., and the sergeants call you sir before they slug you. Very strongly recommended.
JULIAN SYMONS in *Sunday Times*.

DR. NO

by **IAN FLEMING**
(JONATHAN CAPE, 13/6)

This is Ian Fleming's latest thriller and his tensest yet. Our hero turns up something big in the person of Dr. No—who combines power-mania with expert sadism, and wields steel pincers in place of hands. Dr. No is just possibly too nerve-racking.
ELIZABETH BAUM in *Tatler & Bystander*.

A New Story by

AUTHOR:

LAWRENCE G. BLOCHMAN

TITLE:

The Man Who Lost His Taste

TYPE:

Detective Story

DETECTIVE:

Dr. Daniel Webster Coffee

LOCALE:

Northbank, United States

TIME:

The Present

COMMENTS:

An interesting peek(o) into the aromatic world of tea-tasting—with that trio of modern investigators, Drs. Coffee and Mookerji, pathologists, and detective Ritter of the Northbank police . . .

EDITORS' FILE CARD

DR. COFFEE had never laid eyes on Quentin Laird until the night of Laird's twenty-ninth—and last—birthday. Until that moment Laird had been a number on a rack of test tubes, a set of microscopic slides, an unusual case referred by the pathologist of Northbank's Veterans' Hospital to Dr. Daniel Webster Coffee, pathologist at Pasteur Hospital.

At second hand, Dr. Coffee knew that Laird had been a young tea-taster when the draft boards began scraping the bottom of the barrel in the middle 1940s, that the Northbank draft board had not considered tea-tasting an essential occupation, and that

Laird had fought his war with the C.B.I. Command in Assam, where he could duck into a nearby tea plantation when off duty. Some time after his return home and his honourable discharge, Laird had entered the Veterans' Hospital with a malady which was diagnosed as pulmonary T.B. It was a natural error because the symptoms and the x-ray pictures were characteristic. When the Army pathologist couldn't isolate any Koch's bacilli, however, he called on Dr. Coffee whose microscope picked up an oval yeast-like fungus cell known as monilia.

Learning Laird's civilian profession and the geography of his

military service, Dr. Coffee made the diagnosis of Bronchomoniliasis—tea-taster's cough. After three months of radio therapy and heavy doses of potassium iodide, Laird left the hospital and—so the pathologist thought at the time—Dr. Coffee's life.

Dr. Coffee had completely forgotten about the tea-taster for more than a year, until the day his sister Ellen Laird walked into the pathology lab of Pasteur Hospital in a state bordering on nervous collapse. It was the day before Quentin's twenty-ninth birthday.

"You saved my brother once, Doctor," she said, "and you're going to have to save him again. Will you?"

"Relapse?" Dr. Coffee's long fingers brushed the unruly straw-coloured hair back from his pensively brow.

"No. He's going to kill himself."

Dr. Coffee chuckled sympathetically as though to say, *This doesn't sound like a case for pathology, but I like your appealing brown eyes and your quick, wistful smile and the wavy brown hair that frames your fine young face. Regardless of your brother, I'd like to help you . . .*

"People who talk about committing suicide rarely do," he said.

"You don't know Quentin," the girl said. "He will. He's got a Japanese pistol he brought home from the Far East. You see, he can't work at his job any more. He was a tea-taster—and for ten days now he's lost his sense of taste. That's possible, isn't it?"

The pathologist nodded. "The medical term is ageusia. Everybody has a minor form of it when he gets a cold, or smokes too much."

"Quentin doesn't smoke."
"Or it could be an involvement of the ninth nerve, but that's rare. Why doesn't he go back to the hospital for a checkup?"

"He'd die first! Mr. Phelps—that's his boss at the Great Indo-Cathay Tea Company—told him to take a few weeks off and go away for a rest. But he just sits at home and mopes and reads Sanskrit. Quentin is . . . well, he's a . . ."

"A rather sensitive young man, I gather," said Dr. Coffee, who really meant: *He's a spoiled brat, certainly a neurotic, possibly psychotic, and probably in need of psychiatry rather than pathology.* He added, aloud, "Has your brother ever married, Miss Laird?"

"No, Quentin has lived with me ever since our parents were both killed in an auto accident."

So that's it, the pathologist thought; no wonder the girl seems so upset. There's more emotional involvement here than mere sisterly concern. Perhaps there's some sort of latent Byronic attachment in the making.

He said: "You're an extremely attractive young lady, Miss Laird, and yet you're not married either. Does your attitude towards your brother—your feeling of responsibility, I mean—have anything to do with the fact that you're still single?"

"Oh, no!" Ellen Laird blushed slightly. "Of course that's what

Bill Albertson says, but it's not so. Not really."

"I take it Bill Albertson is in love with you and wants to marry you, but balks at marrying your brother, too. Right?"

"Please, Doctor!" The girl's eyes flashed. "I don't see that my personal affairs have anything to do—"

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to pry. Just what do you want of me, Miss Laird?"

"I want you to talk to Quentin as a friend. Could you and Mrs. Coffee come over tomorrow night after dinner? It's Quentin's birthday. Do you play bridge?"

"My wife says not," Dan Coffee murmured. "However, Mrs. Coffee is in New York visiting her sister. I'll come."

"Oh, thank you!" Ellen Laird threw her arms impetuously around his neck and kissed him on the cheek.

When the girl had left, the pathologist strolled across the laboratory to the workbench at which Dr. Mortal Mookerji sat on a high stool, snipping off bits of spleen with a scissors and popping them into a jar of formalin. Dr. Mookerji, the resident pathologist at Pasteur Hospital, possessed degrees from Calcutta University, a vast knowledge of microbiology and biochemistry, a spheroidal silhouette, and a highly individualistic approach to the English language. He was not aware of Dr. Coffee's presence until the chief pathologist tugged playfully at the tail of his pink turban.

"With your tropical back-

ground, Doctor," Dan Coffee said, "you must be familiar with tea-taster's cough."

"Quite," said Dr. Mookerji. "Same is somewhat prevalent in northerly portions of native Bengal and Brahmaputra Valley, where causative fungus inhabits tea leaves."

"Have you ever heard of brain lesions or cranial nerve involvement in moniliasis?"

"Recollection is negative," said the Hindu resident. "Have never seen case of monilia fungus wandering in cranial bloodstream. What, please, are cerebral symptoms?"

"The patient seems to have lost his sense of taste. And since I made the original diagnosis, I'm going to follow through."

"Am wishing you seven-fold blessing of Ganesh, who is Vedantic god of good luck and learning," said Dr. Mookerji.

On his way home that night Dr. Coffee stopped off at the public library for an armful of books destined to give him a theoretical background on tea and the tasting thereof. Before he fell asleep he learned the difference between fermented, semi-fermented, and green teas, between the Congous and the Darjeelings, the Oologs and the Ceylons. He learned that ever since the Tea Inspection Act of 1897 no tea is admitted to the United States unless it passes the standards fixed by a board of Government Tea Examiners.

He did not learn from his books why the Northbank branch of the Great Indo-Cathay Tea Company,

nearly a thousand miles from the point of importation, had to have its own tea-taster, but he got the answer next morning from Robert Phelps, the big, bluff, ruddy-faced manager of Indo-Cathay's blending and packing plant on the outskirts of town.

"Northbank is the centre of an extensive hard-water region of the Middle West," Phelps explained. "We make a special blend here for the hard-water market—more Assam and other robust teas which will give the same standard Indo-Cathay flavour even when brewed with local water."

Laird? One of the best tea-tasters in the business.

"I'm worried about the boy," Phelps said. "He had one of the cleanest palates I ever encountered. What do you suppose is wrong with the lad, Doctor?"

"I'm trying to find out."

"Do you think it could be purely psychosomatic? I mean . . . well, I suppose you know about his situation at home?"

"Vaguely. Tell me more."

"I'm very fond of them all. You know Bill Albertson works here, too—head of our shipping department."

"That's the chap who's in love with Laird's sister?"

"Yes. Laird and Albertson used to be close friends, but they barely speak to each other now. Ellen has always mothered Quent and doesn't much like the idea of throwing him out after she marries Albertson, which is what Albertson insists on. So Laird sits tight and holds up the marriage and probably develops guilt feel-

ings about it. Could a conflict like that produce symptoms like the loss of taste, Doctor?"

"Possibly. But we'd have to rule out physical causes first. Could I see where Laird works? I've never seen a tasting room before."

The temporarily deserted bailiwick of Quentin Laird was a small ground-floor room at the rear of Indo-Cathay's main building. In the centre of the room stood a large circular table on which a dozen thin china bowls were arranged in pairs around the rim. A number of metal canisters were stacked in the centre of the table. Phelps touched the edge of the table and it revolved slowly—so that the tea-taster sitting between a two-foot-tall gleaming chromium cuspidor and a stationary stand containing his standard teas for comparison could go quickly from one taste impression to another without getting up.

"Where did Laird keep his cheese?"

"Cheese?" Phelps stared.

"I read somewhere that when a tea-taster felt his palate getting tired, he would nibble cheese or nuts or something."

"Yes, some do. Laird used to take a sip of almond-and-barley water to freshen up his taste buds."

"And this fellow Albertson? Where's his office?"

"Just inside the warehouse, across the arcway there," Phelps pointed. "Want to speak to him?"

"Not now." The pathologist shook his head. "I'll probably be seeing him tonight."

Quentin Laird's birthday was a lugubrious affair, without even the melancholy gaiety of a wake. Dr. Coffee wished gloomily he had not come. Even the weather was foul—a stormy night full of rain and the sound and fury of wind-lashed trees—the perfect night to go to bed with Dumas Père's monumental cook-book and read of gastronomic delights, rather than worry over a tea-taster who could no longer taste.

Quentin Laird turned out to be the limp, undernourished, overwrought, self-pitying young man that Dr. Coffee had imagined. He was self-consciously aesthetic with pale blue eyes and scarcely any eyebrows. He was much more interesting, Dr. Coffee thought, when he had been merely a case history, a number in the laboratory; yet there was no denying the fact that the pallid young man was generating a heavily charged atmosphere as electric as a summer storm.

When the cut of the cards paired Quentin Laird and Bill Albertson as partners, Dr. Coffee could practically smell the ozone. Albertson was a thick-set, saturnine character with a bull-dog jaw and sheep's eyes. The jaw was for Laird and the eyes were for Ellen. After Laird had made a jump bid with only a jack singleton trump support (down four at small slam doubled), the jaw was working overtime.

Ellen Laird was nervously playing the mother hen, trying desperately, with much clucking, to extend her protective wings over both chicks. She was not doing

very well when the doorbell rang and Robert Phelps came in, accompanied by a gust of rain and a whine of wind.

Phelps had two bottles of champagne under one arm, a dripping umbrella under the other, and a vibrant Happy Birthday in his throat. He had started to sing *Happy Birthday To You* before the icy silence enveloped him and frost began to form on his vocal cords. He handed the bottles to Ellen.

"Just off the ice," he boomed jovially. "Pop the corks."

"The birthday boy can't taste anything," Albertson growled.

"I'll pop the corks," Laird snapped. "Glasses, Ellen."

"But, Quent, you never drink champagne—"

"Tonight I'm being dragged screaming into my thirtieth year," Laird interrupted. "Get the glasses, Ellen." He turned to Dr. Coffee. "I've been protecting my taste buds for years, and what's happened to them? Tonight I think I'll get slightly stinko. Okay with you, Doctor?"

"Fine idea," Dr. Coffee said. "Happy Birthday."

Laird emptied three quick glasses while Dr. Coffee was sipping his first. Ellen put down her glass after drinking the birthday toast, disappeared into the kitchen, and came back with a cup of tea.

"I don't suppose anyone else wants tea," she said.

Laird put his arm around his sister, leaned over her shoulder, and sniffed the cup.

"Tea?" he gibed. "That's the

Earl Grey I brought home last week. It's not tea—it's perfume."

He reached for the cup, touched it to his lips twice, then handed it back. A curious smile flickered across his face as he turned slowly to Phelps.

"Bob," he said gravely, "I think my taste is coming back."

"Congratulations. Then this is a happy birthday."

"Maybe I'll go to the plant tonight," Laird's peculiar smile returned to twist the corners of his lips. "I've got lots of back work to do."

"Plenty of time tomorrow, Quent." Phelps slapped the tea-taster heartily on the back. "Bright and early in the morning."

"Bright and early and hung over," Albertson remarked.

"Well, I just came by to wish you many happy returns," Phelps said. "I've got to run now. Good night all."

As soon as the front door had closed, Quentin Laird donned his raincoat.

"Quent, where are you going?" Ellen asked uneasily.

"I told you I had back work to do."

"But Mr. Phelps said tomorrow would—"

"Sorry Ellen brought you out here for nothing, Doctor," Laird broke in. "Thanks, anyhow. Good night, Bill. Night, Sis."

The door slammed behind him. "Bill!" There was alarm in Ellen's voice. "Go after him!"

"Let him sit down at his revolving table again," Albertson said. "Good for him psychologically. Right, Doctor?"

"I'm afraid," said Dr. Coffee, "that this has gone beyond the province of pathology. I—" He stopped. Ellen Laird had turned deathly pale. She rushed from the room. An instant later she was back, trembling.

"Bill! You must go after him. His gun is gone."

"His gun is in his desk at the plant," Albertson protested. "It's been there for at least ten days."

"All the more reason, Bill. Please!"

Albertson made an aspirin face. "Okay," he said grudgingly.

Dr. Coffee had raided the refrigerator, leafed through the current issue of the *Journal of Clinical Pathology*, and was just falling asleep when his phone rang. It was Max Ritter, lieutenant of detectives, Northbank police.

"Hi, Doc," said the detective. "You know that guy you phoned me about this morning? That tea-taster?"

"You mean Quentin Laird, Max?"

"That's him. Well, he did it. He just shot himself. Dead. I'm on my way. Do I pick you up, Doc?"

"I'll be waiting, Max," the pathologist said, reaching for his trousers.

It was still raining when Dr. Coffee and the lanky, sad-eyed police detective reached the Great Indo-Cathay Tea Company. Quentin Laird was lying face down in the rain-spattered area-way between the main building and the warehouse. The headlights

of a squad car illuminated the scene. The wet pavement was reddened by a halo of blood from a wound in the tea-taster's right temple. A revolver lay near his right hand.

The coroner had not yet arrived, so while Ritter questioned the night watchman, Dr. Coffee conducted his own somewhat extralegal examination of the body.

The watchman's story was simple. When he punched the clock at Station 37 in the far wing of the main building, he had noticed through the window that there was a light in the tasting room on the ground floor. When he reached Station 27, the light had gone out. An instant later he heard a shot—one shot. He had rushed down, found Laird lying in the areaway, called the police.

No, he had seen no one about. Nor had he heard any cars driving up or away; but by then the rain was making an awful racket . . .

"Damn the rain," Max Ritter said as Dr. Coffee was covering the body with his own slicker. "Washes out the whole works. No footprints, no powder marks, no nothing. You think the guy bumped himself off, Doc?"

"I don't know, Max. He said tonight he'd got his taste back, but he was a funny bird. Even so, I can't see why he would come all the way out here to shoot himself, and then do it in the rain instead of in his office. Look, Max." The pathologist lowered his voice. "Laird had a bottle in the inside pocket of his coat. It broke when he fell. Will you make sure the coroner doesn't mess up the frag-

ments when he gets here? I may be able to analyse the residue. I wonder—? Hello, Mr. Phelps."

The manager of the Great Indo-Cathay Tea Company stepped from the tasting room and pushed through the rain-soaked group of policemen. He had apparently dressed in a hurry. His tie was askew and one shoe was untied. He carried a furled umbrella. His face was drawn with anxiety as he looked around in silence, the rain dripping from his hat, his wet shoulders glistening in the rays of the headlamps.

"They just called me," he said. "I never thought—Good God, he's done it after all!"

"Don't touch anything, Mr. Phelps," Ritter said. "Who called you?"

"The watchman. My wife didn't want to wake me but—"

"You think he shot himself, Mr. Phelps?"

"Well, he talked a lot about it these last few days but I never really believed him. Has anybody seen Albertson?"

"Last I saw of him he was setting out to follow Laird," Dr. Coffee said. "That must have been two hours ago."

"Curious," Phelps said. "Has anyone notified Ellen?"

"I'll take care of Miss Laird," Dr. Coffee said, "as soon as the coroner gets here."

When Dr. Mookerji waddled into the pathology lab at eight the next morning, he found Dr. Coffee surrounded by test tubes and gently hissing Bunsen burners.

"Salaam, Doctor Sahib," said

the resident, pressing the tips of his fingers together. "Prominent sub-ocular rings are indicating nocturnal sleeplessness. You had irksome night-time emergencies, Doctor?"

"We've got a rather complicated qualitative to run," Dr. Coffee said, "and not much material to work with. I think we're looking for an acid. But if you get stuck, don't use up the last drop. Save enough for x-ray diffraction."

"*Shabash!*" exclaimed Dr. Mookerji. "We are again stalking homicidal murderers for Leftenant Ritter?"

"Our ex-moniliasis case was shot to death last night. The coroner thinks it's suicide but he's agreed to an autopsy. Will you join me downstairs in an hour, Doctor?"

"With utmost lugubrious pleasure," said Dr. Mookerji.

Max Ritter was sitting on Dr. Coffee's desk when the pathologist and his Hindu resident returned to the laboratory, bearing Mason jars and white enamel pails.

"Hi, Doc," the detective said, pushing his soft felt hat back from deep-set eyes. "Find anything?"

"Not to the naked eye, Max. No brain tumour. No necrosis of the ninth nerve. We'll have to wait a few days for the microscopic sections. What about you?"

"The Laird dame's still a total loss," Ritter replied. "The family doc pumped her full of sedatives."

"What about Albertson?"

"He sticks to his story. Says he started out after Laird and got a flat tyre. It took him half an hour

to dig up a service station that was open and another twenty minutes to get the tyre changed. When he got to the tea plant everything was dark and he didn't see anybody around, so he went home."

"How does it check, Max?"

"He looked in at Laird's office, all right. We found his prints on the glass door. And the service station backs him on the flat. I also checked the watchman's clock. But Albertson's tyre was fixed in plenty time for him to be at the plant when Laird was shot. He also had plenty of time to be there ten to fifteen minutes before the shooting. Maybe he did look around, didn't see Laird, and left. Maybe—Doc, when we first walked through that tasting room, did you notice an umbrella leaning against the round table?"

"No, I didn't. Have you sealed the warehouse, Max?"

"Tight as six ticks. This guy Phelps is yelling his head off because we're holding up tea shipments. So I let him yell. I also padlocked the tasting room."

"With that umbrella inside?"

"Well, no," said the detective. "Funny thing. When I put the padlock on last night, the umbrella was gone."

Quentin Laird was buried in a flag-draped casket with full military honours. An American Legion chaplain pronounced the eulogy. Legion buglers played Taps, and Legion riflemen fired the regulation three volleys over a grave banked high with flowers—most of them from the lush gardens of Robert Phelps.

Ellen Laird, sobbing on the shoulder of Bill Albertson, was convinced her brother had taken his own life, as he had threatened to do. At least one of the mourners knew this was untrue. So did Dr. Coffee.

"It's homicide, Max," the pathologist had explained to Ritter just before the funeral. "But it won't be necessary to hold up the interment. I've got all the evidence here in my lab."

The evidence, as Dr. Coffee expanded further, consisted of microscopic sections of tissue that had surrounded Laird's fatal wound. Not only did the sections show no flame burns—proof that the gun muzzle was not within six inches—but there was no powder tattooing. The rain may have washed away superficial powder stains, but a gun fired at a distance of from twelve to sixteen inches would have blasted powder grains deep into the secondary layers of skin. The microscope had found none. Therefore the muzzle of the gun that killed Laird had been held more than sixteen inches from his head—an awkward, unusual, and practically impossible position for a man committing suicide.

"Okay, so it's murder," said Ritter. "Where do we go from here, Doc?"

"Dr. Mookerji and I have a theory. Tell him, Doctor."

"Quite," said the Hindu. "Have completed analysis of residual liquid in fragments of broken bottle from late tea-taster's pocket. Have identified traces of gymnemic acid."

"You don't say!" exclaimed Ritter with mock surprise. "And just what the hell are you talking about?"

"Gymnemic acid, Leftenant," said Dr. Mookerji, "is active principle permeating leaves of plant entitled gymnema sylvestre, which is close relative of milkweed family. Am remembering that in native Bengal—"

"What's this Jim Whosis got to do with tea?" Ritter demanded.

"That," said Dr. Coffee, "is what we've got to find out. I had the New York office of the Food and Drug Administration on the phone a while ago. The Chief U.S. Tea Examiner agreed to fly one of his best men out here tonight, if you will wire him an official request—you or the chief of police."

"I'm official enough to send the wire," Ritter said, "even if I'm not official enough to be filled in on your secret."

The pathologist chuckled. "I'll explain when I go to the airport with you to meet the tea man, Max. Meanwhile, you'd better get a badge and credentials to make him a *pro tem* member of the Northbank police force—under any name except Sebastian Oxford. That's his real name. I want him to prowls around the Indo-Cathay warehouse tomorrow—as a cop. And keep Albertson and Phelps away from him."

"Easy, Doc. Phelps goes to Cleveland for the day, and I'll keep Albertson busy at the police station till Oxford gets what he wants."

The phone rang and Dr. Coffee

answered. "Oh, hello, Professor . . . You have? . . . Good. Tomorrow? Dr. Mookerji too? . . . Thanks a lot. I'll tell him."

When he had hung up, the pathologist explained: "That was Professor Street of the Botany Department at Northbank College. At my request, he's made a survey of asclepiadaceous plants in this region. He's located some very interesting specimens. I want you to go with him tomorrow, Dr. Mookerji, to help identify some of the more exotic species. He'll pick you up at eleven."

"Am most gratified, personally and botanically," the Hindu said.

Dr. Coffee was away most of the next day which was Saturday—a biopsy at a Boone Point hospital without a pathologist, and an autopsy for an insurance company at Lycoville. On his return he went into a huddle with Max Ritter, Dr. Mookerji, and Sebastian Oxford, the U.S. Tea Examiner.

The huddle was interrupted by a long and indignant phone call from Bill Albertson, protesting "police persecution" and threatening legal action if he and Ellen Laird were further molested. Dan Coffee's reply was an invitation to Sunday breakfast. He then called Robert Phelps and extended an invitation to him. After all, when the wife's away, the amateur chef will play . . .

The orange juice had been squeezed and the house was redolent with the fragrance of frying bacon when the guests began to arrive. Dr. Coffee was

very proud of his buckwheat cakes, as well as the delicately smoked breakfast sausage that an ex-patiente sent him regularly from Indiana. And once he had graced the table with the half gallon of scrambled eggs and the gallon of coffee (his own blend of Caracolillo, Puerto Rico, and Medellin), he kept the conversation on a high gastronomic plane. He even avoided introductions until the food had disappeared.

"I hope you like my coffee," he said. "I wouldn't dare serve tea to experts like Mr. Phelps, Mr. Albertson, and Mr. Oxford."

"Oxford?" Phelps said. "Not Sebastian Oxford, the tea examiner?"

Mr. Oxford bowed modestly. He was a moon-faced, well-fed man whom any television panel would have picked as a truck driver rather than a tea-taster.

"Mr. Oxford," the pathologist continued, "brings us the interesting news that several thousand chests of substandard tea which were illegally removed from a New York warehouse last month have mysteriously turned up in Northbank. Now—"

Bill Albertson half rose from his chair. "Are you implying," he shouted, "that the Indo-Cathay shipping department had something to do with smuggling substandard tea into this country?"

"Oh, no," Mr. Oxford smiled blandly. "I'm merely stating that a shipment of Java black tea was recently denied entrance to the United States because it was not only substandard but had also absorbed a slight taint from being

stowed near a cargo of hides. Who bribed whom and how the tea was spirited out of the New York warehouse, I can't say. That's a matter for the F.B.I. and Treasury Agents to determine. But I can say that this tainted tea is now in the Indo-Cathay warehouse in Northbank. The off-taste had been disguised by spraying the tea with oil of bergamot which has, in fact, produced a fairly good imitation Earl Grey tea. True, Earl Grey is China black sprayed with bergamot, but we're not getting much tea from China these days, and the bergamot is a dominant fragrance."

"Should we assume," said Phelps, "that since Lieutenant Ritter is here this morning, the Earl Grey concerns poor Laird's suicide?"

"Murder," corrected Max Ritter.

Bill Albertson upset his coffee cup.

"The connection is obvious," explained Dr. Coffee as he reached over to hide the stain with a clean napkin. "To conceal the presence of the fraudulent shipment, Laird's palate had to be put out of commission. Since Laird was accustomed to refresh his taste buds with an infusion of almonds and barley water, it was simple enough to spike the bottle with another infusion, made with the leaves of a plant called *gymnema sylvestre*. These leaves partially paralysed the taste buds so that the palate is no longer sensitive to the taste of bitter or sweet."

"Then my brother was . . . was . . ." Ellen Laird began. She stopped, looking fearfully from Phelps to Albertson.

"Professor Street informs me," Dr. Coffee continued, "that *gymnema sylvestre* belongs to the family of the asclepiadaceae of which several dozen varieties exist in this region. Mr. Phelps, for instance, has some beautiful and colourful butterfly weed in his garden." Dr. Coffee took a deep breath, then added, "Mr. Phelps also grows *gymnema sylvestre*."

"Doctor, I resent your implication," Phelps exclaimed.

"Implication, my eye!" said Ritter. "That's a charge, Phelps—of murder. The D.A.'s fixing up the complaint right now."

"But Laird committed suicide," Phelps insisted.

"I'll prove in court that he didn't," said Dr. Coffee. "Miss Laird, you'll be deeply grieved to learn that unwittingly you helped cause your brother's death. During the few days he sat at home brooding, his palate recovered from its temporary paralysis. And when he took a sip of the Earl Grey tea you made on the night of his birthday, he found that his taste had returned, that he could recognise the deficiencies in the tea. Phelps was present and must have noted your brother's recovery because he left immediately. He preceded Laird to the office, took possession of the gun which Laird kept in his desk—"

"You have a magnificent imagination, Doctor," Phelps broke in.

"You forget I was present when Laird discovered his taste had returned," Dr. Coffee continued. "I noticed the strange expression on his face as he sipped the tea, but I couldn't have analysed it

then without the background I have now. You could and you did. You knew he wasn't going to the office to commit suicide, but to investigate the off-taste of the Earl Grey tea. You simply had to get there first.

"When Laird found you in his office, he must have accused you of skulduggery. You would deny it, of course, and he would naturally suggest that you both step over to the warehouse to look for the substandard tea his palate had told him was there. You knew he would find it, so you shot him while crossing the areaway. You also smashed the bottle he was carrying under his coat. Luckily there was enough residue for Dr. Mookerji to analyse."

"Doctor," Phelps asserted, "I was not inside the tasting room between the time I left Laird's house and the time I came to the plant and found him dead."

"I might believe that, despite the evidence of the gymnema sylvestre," said Dr. Coffee, "if it were not for your umbrella."

"Umbrella?"

"When Lieutenant Ritter and

I first reached the plant, there was an umbrella standing in the corner of Laird's office—where you had forgotten it when you came to kill Laird. When you appeared after the call from the watchman, you came into the areaway through Laird's office—carrying a furled umbrella. The umbrella was gone from Laird's office when Ritter and I left."

"The umbrella I was carrying," Phelps declared, "I brought from home."

"If you had brought the umbrella from home," Dr. Coffee pursued, "the umbrella would have been wet and you would have been dry. But when you appeared in the areaway, the umbrella was furled and dry, and you were dripping wet. So it was obviously you who retrieved the umbrella from Laird's office. Or do you still insist you weren't there, Phelps?"

Phelps opened his mouth but no words came.

"Drink up, Phelps," said Max Ritter, pushing back his chair. "Maybe the tea and coffee they serve downtown where we're going won't be to your taste."

AUTHOR:

HELEN McCLOY

TITLE:

The Silent Informer

TYPE:

Detective Story

DETECTIVE:

Dr. Basil Willing

LOCALE:

Cape Cod, Massachusetts

TIME:

The Present

COMMENTS:

Gertrude Ehrenthal, the famous concert pianist, had the stricken look of widowhood. She wore stark black and white. At least one person thought the pianist needed "a touch of red".

EDITORS' FILE CARD

SHE was lovely the first time Basil Willing saw her, in the village street. She seemed all one colour—her skin tanned a pale gold; her hair, dark gold; and her eyes, a warm amber, like sherry by firelight. Her dress was white dimity, sprigged with rosebuds, and there was a pale pink rose in the olive-green ribbon of her yellow Leghorn hat.

He asked his neighbour, Paul Amory, who she was. "A girl of the golden west?"

"No, the Swaines are Boston. They've been coming to this part of the Cape in summer for a long time. Sybilla's just nineteen."

She looked quite different the afternoon she came up the path to Paul's beach cottage. An ugly brown stain spread across the billowing, white skirt. There were smears of mud along the hem.

Both men had risen. Paul cried, "Sybilla! What happened?"

"Everything." She was on the verge of tears.

"Is somebody following you?" Basil looked towards the dunes. A tall clump of bayberry was quivering as if someone had just forced a path through it.

"I don't think so, but . . ."

Paul said, "This is Dr. Willing. He has the cottage near mine this year."

She turned to Basil. "You're a criminologist, aren't you?"

He smiled. "Just a psychiatrist who has worked with the police in New York."

"I didn't know that." Paul glanced at him in surprise. "What happened to your dress, Sybilla? Did you see Mrs. Ehrenthal?"

"I saw her all right." The golden skin was flushed a ripe



apricot. "I'm so ashamed. And I still don't understand it."

"Tell me," said Paul.

Basil made a move to go. The girl herself detained him. "Maybe you can help. It's nothing criminal, but it is . . . peculiar. Every summer this village has a square dance and covered-dish supper for local charities. Summer people, like us, who've been coming here for years, pitch in and help. This year there were so many more summer people than usual that our committee decided to get a paid organiser from New York and the agency sent us Paul. He mailed printed notices of the dance to everybody in the local telephone book and he gave each of us a list of people to see personally. On my list was Gertrude Ehrenthal. You've heard of her? She used to be a famous concert pianist. She's a widow now and wealthy."

"I ignored her wealth," said Paul. "I just wanted her to play for us."

"But what made you think she would?" protested Sybilla. "She's one of those women who have nothing to do with village life or even with other summer people. She's a New Yorker and she just isn't interested in us. She bought the old Ashley place three years ago, when the Ashleys were so hard up. Jim Eggers, the real estate man, has been trying to buy it back for the Ashleys ever since, but she won't sell. I knew she had never acknowledged the printed notice of the dance you sent her and I was sure she would turn me down, but . . . You were

so insistent that I finally bearded the lioness in her den this afternoon. I wish I hadn't."

"Just as I rang the front doorbell, a big boxer came lopping across the turf and stood beside me. He looked so fierce I was a little afraid of him. I felt quite relieved when the door was opened by a young man and the dog ran into the house ahead of me. I told the young man I'd come to see Mrs. Ehrenthal about the square dance. He showed me into a drawing room and said he'd tell his mother I was there. The dog crouched on a white bearskin rug, while I waited. His paws had left a muddy track on the white velvet carpet. It was a lovely room in shades of white—pearl and oyster, cream and ivory, with touches of gilt."

"The son came back with Mrs. Ehrenthal. She was very New Yorkish and clever-looking—"

"What was the son like?" asked Basil.

"Oh, I don't know." Sybilla, who was so ready with words for Mrs. Ehrenthal, had none at all for the famous woman's son. "He was all right, I guess . . . When I told her about the square dance, she surprised me by saying, 'I'd love to play for an audience once more. I'll write you a cheque for our tickets and then you must have tea with us.' She even explained about not answering our printed notice. It had been addressed to the wrong post office box—703—and, as hers is 610, she'd only just got it."

"All the time we talked the dog had been roaming the room and

leaving that muddy track wherever he went, even on a window seat with pearl-satin cushions. A little maid brought in a big tea tray and Eric—the son—set up an old tip-table. Just as he was handing me a plate of small cakes, the dog put its muddy forepaws on my skirt and snatched a cake out of my hand. Mrs. Ehrenthal exclaimed, 'Oh, your pretty dress!' I was brought up properly, so I said, 'It doesn't matter,' and sipped my tea and tried to pretend nothing had happened. When the dog realised I had no more cake, he bounded towards the cake dish on the table. Those old tea tables with hinged tops are rightly called 'tip-tables.' He lunged and the whole thing toppled over with a hideous crash of delicate china. Tea streamed over the rug—they'll never get the stain out—and scalded my knees."

"I lost control. I cried out, 'Really, I should think you'd train your dog!' and then . . . Oh, you can never guess what happened. Mrs. Ehrenthal said, 'My dog? I thought of course it was yours!'

"Oh, laugh, if you like. That part is funny, I know. But it wasn't a bit funny afterwards. I believed her when she said the dog wasn't hers, but she didn't believe me when I said it wasn't mine. She behaved as if she thought I was just trying to get out of paying for the damage. She said, 'My dear Miss Swayne, do you seriously expect me to believe that dog is not yours? Why else would he come into the house with you?'

"You see the son had answered

the doorbell himself and seen the dog come in with me. Evidently he'd told her something like: 'There's a girl here to see you about the village dance and she's brought her dog with her.' They had never seen me before. They had no way of knowing whether I had a dog or not and they'd been too polite to say anything about the dog when they thought he was mine—just as I'd been too polite to say anything about him when I thought he was theirs."

"By this time the dog had run out an open French window with Eric chasing him, so I was alone with her when I left. I said, 'I never saw that dog before in my life,' and walked out. But I still don't understand it. Why did the dog walk into the house with me if it wasn't theirs? And why wouldn't they believe me when I said it wasn't mine?"

"Do the Ehrenthals own another dog?" said Basil. "Perhaps a female?"

"No. She said they'd never had a dog."

"Maybe she was lying herself." Basil's eyes twinkled. "Maybe she isn't as wealthy as you think and needs a new carpet, so she staged the whole thing with her own dog, hoping she could make you pay for the damage."

"But she couldn't hope to prove in court that the dog was mine when he isn't," answered Sybilla, seriously. "And it would be hard to stage a thing like that. You'd have to spend weeks training a dog to upset a tea table on purpose. And she couldn't have known beforehand that I was

coming there this afternoon."

"Perhaps the dog belongs to the son," suggested Paul. "Maybe he acquired it this afternoon and, now the animal's done so much damage, he doesn't dare admit to his mother that it's his."

Basil spoke more thoughtfully. "You say the dog was a boxer. Was he brindled, with a brass-studded collar?"

"Yes. Do you know him?"

"It's just occurred to me that maybe I do."

"You mean Loki?" Paul was astonished. "He'd have to cross Route 28 to get to the Ehrenthals. I've trained him not to cross highways. He might be killed."

"Where is Loki now?"

Paul let out a piercing whistle. "Your dog?" Sybilla was amazed. "Why haven't I seen him before?"

"You never came up here before," answered Paul. "I don't take him to the village. He's too big for a car dog."

"But what would he be doing at the Ehrenthals?"

"I have no idea." Paul frowned. "Poor Loki! I'll have to keep him on a chain now . . . And I'll have to pay for Mrs. Ehrenthal's carpet, to say nothing of your dress."

"Never mind my dress," answered Sybilla, cheerfully.

But Paul wasn't listening. He let out another high-pitched whistle. "Where is the fellow? Excuse me a minute . . ." He ran down the steps.

A breath of wind sighed and the shadows lengthened, as if the

day were stretching and yawning as it turned towards night. "I must go," said Sybilla. Basil walked down the sandy path with her. As they came to her car, they saw Paul farther down the drive, facing a clump of bayberry. When he heard their steps, he called out in a tight voice, "Willing! Come here—quick!"

The big boxer lay on his side among the bushes, his eyes half open, filmed and dull. Above the collar, his throat had been slashed. Arterial blood still flowed with a faint pulsation. There was no sign of a knife.

Paul Amory was not the type to show emotion easily. He was lean, wiry, and tough-looking. But now his face was as white as the sand.

"Loki . . ." He knelt beside the dying dog. The eyes opened a little wider—questioning, bewildered. The tail twitched in mute recognition.

"It's the same dog." Tears came into Sybilla's eyes . . .

At last Paul stood up. "You said that Eric Ehrenthal followed the dog out of the house. Did you see either of them again?"

"No."

"We all three saw something moving in the bushes just as you reached my house. Loki must have been killed then—while we sat talking. He couldn't bark. His throat was cut."

Sybilla protested. "I can't imagine Mrs. Ehrenthal or her son—"

"Can't you? I can." Paul's grey eyes were murderous. "If they dare to show their faces at the

dance tonight, I shall have something to say to them."

The Village Hall embodied every decorative commonplace of its era—the picture window without a view, the panels of pine planks riddled with knotholes that previous generations discarded as unfit for building, and the machine-braided rug in strident green that screamed at the orange tone of the woodwork. A TV set and a built-in bar provided depressants for mind and body simultaneously. A smaller braided rug, behind the bar, muffled the bartender's footsteps, and, of course, there was a bar lamp with a driftwood base and a shade cut from an old chart of Nantucket Sound. It and the overhead lights were fluorescents that hesitated ponderously when they came on and then shed a glare that clung mercilessly to every wrinkle and blemish in every middle-aged face.

A long table was laden with casseroles of clam chowder and a handsome glazed ham with a bone-handled carving knife sharpened to a surgical edge, so that everyone could have at least one paper-thin slice. Paul, officiating behind the bar, offered Basil and Sybilla punch and said to Basil, "You know Jim Eggers, the real estate agent?"

"Who doesn't?" Basil smiled at a gaunt, colourless man waiting his turn at the bar.

Sybilla was looking towards the entrance at the other end of the room. "Here comes Fanny Ashley."

"The one who's trying to buy back the old Ashley place?"

Eggers turned pale eyes on Basil. "What gave you that idea? I made an offer, but I wasn't acting for the Ashleys, as everyone in the village seems to think. I was acting for a lawyer in New York and Heaven only knows whom he was acting for. Funny anyone wanting that place."

"Why?"

"It's so big. There are few people today like the Ehrenthals, with enough money to keep it up. And nobody local would want it—because of the old story. It was ten years ago, before my time on the Cape, but I heard it all from Miss Ashley herself. When she got hard up, she couldn't sell the place at first, so she rented it to some fellow who turned out to be a crook—a French jewel thief known as Lucien Delorme. He worked Miami night spots in winter and spent his summers here. He was almost arrested in that house and I'm telling you, it rocked the village. He was so plausible that nobody had suspected him. When the police surrounded the house, he knifed one of them and escaped. They never did find the loot he was supposed to have lifted off the suckers in Miami. But the whole business gave the house a bad name."

"Maybe your New York lawyer is acting for the jewel thief who left some of his loot hidden in the house," suggested Basil.

Eggers grinned. "Could be, but what I don't know won't hurt me. Besides, Mrs. Ehrenthal will never sell. She's putting an oil

burner in this fall, so she can spend most of the winter here. It's her son who misses New York, not she. Why, there are the Ehrenthals now, just coming in."

Paul's hand shook as he ladled punch into another paper cup.

"So they did come, after all."

"Let it ride for this evening," advised Basil. "You've no proof the boy killed your dog. You won't help anything by making a scene here."

Fanny Ashley paused beside the bar. Her plumpness was too well distributed to be called fat, but it filled the scant dress of pale raw silk solidly. Smoked glasses in a harequin frame of shocking pink matched her lipstick, concealing her eyes like a Venetian half-mask.

"Sunglasses at night?" murmured Basil.

"Call them moonglasses," returned Sybilla. "The lenses are ground for astigmatism but they're smoked, so nobody will think she has to wear glasses because of her age."

Basil offered Sybilla a cigarette, but his eyes were on Mrs. Ehrenthal. Her sallowness had a sort of sad elegance that came from the notly arched brows and the melancholy composure of her firm lips. It was the stricken look that widowhood leaves on some faces. Her hair was dark and she wore black linen, with a white bolero.

"Too much black and white," observed Sybilla, critically. "She needs a touch of red."

In the son, the sallowness was a warm olive, the brows seemed less sceptical, the lips firm without

the cast of melancholy. An interesting face. It was easy to see why Sybilla hadn't been able to find words for him. He must have bowled her over as something quite different from the crew-cut, mass-produced swains of Harvard, Yale, and Princeton. She wouldn't have wanted to give herself away as she must have if she had tried to describe him.

Mrs. Ehrenthal sat down at the piano, which stood at the other end of the room close to the entrance. Her muscular fingers attacked the keyboard with a hard, brilliant touch that was almost masculine as she went smoothly and easily into the familiar opening chords of the *Appassionata*.

"What a pity to make her play *Turkey in the Straw* after that!" whispered Sybilla.

For a few moments the crowd listened; then whispers became murmurs and, in ten minutes, the music was being played against a sibilant obligato of voices. Eric Ehrenthal stood beside the piano with Fanny Ashley and Eggers. Basil saw Fanny's lips move, but no sound of her voice came to him at such a distance. His eyes were still on the group at the piano when Paul Amory said, "How about more punch?"

At that moment the lights went out.

The sudden blinding darkness stilled every tongue. In the silence the chords from the piano faltered, then stopped.

"*Music ceases,*" whispered Sybilla. "My favourite Shakespearean stage direction."

"What about: *Thunder and*

lightning. Enter Caesar in his nightgown"?

There was a rustling in the darkness. A voice cried loudly, "It can't be a hurricane. Must be a blown fuse."

"Where's the fuse box?" Basil addressed darkness. Paul's voice answered, "Just outside the front door, over by the piano. If I can only find the gate to this bar . . ."

"Never mind. I'll check." Basil groped his way through the crowd. His sense of direction was clear for he had been looking towards the piano just before the lights went out. He lit a match and saw the fuse box on the wall, outside the entrance, to the left. His flame flickered in the wind and went out.

"You should use a lighter." Another flame flared. Eric Ehrenthal's striking face was modelled in high relief by the shadows. Basil pulled open the door of the fuse box. The main switch had been disconnected. Eric asked wryly, "Practical joke?"

"Not very funny." Basil snapped the switch back into contact. For a long moment nothing happened. Then the sluggish fluorescent lights stumbled into being.

A woman screamed. It was Fanny Ashley. The expression of her eyes was still masked by the ridiculous moonglasses, but the direction of her gaze was unmistakable. She was looking toward Gertrude Ehrenthal, slumped forward on the keyboard of the piano. The bone handle of the carving knife from the supper table protruded from her left shoulder. A thin stream of fresh

blood stained the white bolero. A touch of red . . .

In an hour the crowded room was almost emptied. Sybilla and Eric sat close together as if tragedy had forced the sympathy between them to a premature expression. Fanny had taken off her glasses, revealing narrow reddened eyes that made her look years older. Jim was looking curiously at a pair of white cotton workgloves the police had found near the piano.

Lieutenant Copley of the State Police turned to Basil. "You and Miss Swayne and Mr. Amory are obviously in the clear. You were all at the bar at the other end of the room from the fuse box when the lights went out. But Miss Ashley, Mr. Eggers, and Mr. Ehrenthal were standing near the piano, which is close to the front door and the fuse box, while everyone else was clustered around the supper table in the centre of the room. One of those three—Miss Ashley or Ehrenthal or Eggers—must have pulled the main switch and stabbed this woman under the cover of darkness."

Basil turned to Eric. "Mr. Ehrenthal, why didn't your mother believe Miss Swayne when she said the dog at your house this afternoon was not hers?"

Eric answered in a voice still numb with shock. "My mother told me she had seen the dog once before, when she drove past Mr. Amory's cottage. Miss Swayne came to us on an errand from Mr. Amory and the dog seemed to

have come with her. Naturally my mother assumed that the dog was hers and that she had been visiting Mr. Amory's cottage the day my mother saw it there."

"What happened when you followed the dog?"

"He outdistanced me. I didn't kill him."

Lieutenant Copley knew Basil by reputation. "Is it your theory that whoever killed Amory's dog later killed Mrs. Ehrenthal?"

"Yes," answered Basil. "Mr. Eggers, isn't it time you told us who has been trying to buy the old Ashley place from the Ehrenthals?"

"I have no idea. As I told you, I was approached by a lawyer from New York."

"The lawyer's name?"

Eggers hesitated, then he said, "Luke Anders."

"Did you know his practice was chiefly criminal?" Basil turned back to the lieutenant. "Was Lucien Delorme ever caught?"

"No. He's been hiding out for ten years."

"Then it's possible his loot may still be hidden in the Ehrenthal house. It's possible he stabbed Mrs. Ehrenthal because she was going to occupy that house all the year round. She wouldn't sell it. That meant he couldn't gain access to it as long as she lived—that is, without assuming all the risks of burglary. Her son liked New York better than Cape Cod. He would probably sell, if she died, especially if she died by violence and the house acquired tragic associations for him. Mrs. Ehrenthal was putting in a new oil

burner. That could mean digging in the cellar where the loot might be discovered. With her eliminated, Delorme could make a relatively small down payment on the house, recover his loot, and then disappear with a huge profit."

"But Lucien Delorme isn't here now!" protested the lieutenant.

"Are you sure?" Basil's simple question charged the atmosphere explosively. "What did Delorme look like?"

"Medium height, about five feet seven. Stocky, about a hundred and eighty. Sandy hair. Pink skin. Grey eyes."

"Only the height and the colour of the eyes need be the same," said Basil. "He could lose weight and colour in ten years. His hair could have turned grey or have been dyed. His whole appearance could have changed."

Jim Eggers and Paul Amory looked at one another, each suddenly aware of the other's grey eyes and medium height.

"We never got his fingerprints," said the lieutenant.

"You don't need them now," answered Basil. "Let's assume Delorme returned to Ashley Point ten years later, when he thought enough time had elapsed so he wouldn't be recognised. He would assume cover—an apparent occupation that gave him access to everyone in the village, some rôle so functional that he was just a part of the landscape."

Copley gasped. "A real estate agent? Or a paid organiser for charity drives?"

"Are you nuts?" cried Paul.

"I was behind the bar when the lights went out—nowhere near the fuse box."

"So you were," Basil opened the gate in the bar and stepped behind it. "And you were right here when the lights came on again."

"Whoever pulled that switch had to be standing beside the fuse box at the other end of the room when the lights failed," said Paul. "And that's where Jim Eggers—"

Once more the lights went out. Fanny Ashley screamed, "Oh, no! Not again!"

Copley shouted, "Get to that fuse box, Rafferty! The rest of you, cover windows and door."

Flashlights moved in the dark. A voice called, "Fuse blown, lieutenant, but there are some extras. Just a moment."

The lights came on again. Basil was still behind the bar. He rolled aside the small braided rug there, revealing the electric cord that ran under it to the bar lamp. The insulation had been scraped away. Lamplight glittered on two copper wires exposed for two inches, side by side.

"Two more questions, Miss Ashley: Was 703 the post office box number for your house when Delorme lived there? And did he keep a dog?"

"Why, it was 703 . . ." stammered Fanny Ashley. "And he had a little puppy. I think it was a boxer . . ."

"Amory used his foot on the rug that concealed the two ex-

posed wires—to rub them together," Basil explained later. "Of course this caused a short circuit and blew a fuse. He knew Mrs. Ehrenthal would be at the piano near the fuse box. As organiser for the dance, he was familiar with every detail of the Village Hall, and in the dark her music gave him the direction. He snatched the carving knife from the table and stabbed her under cover of darkness while she was still playing. The fuse box was right beside the piano. He had plenty of time to replace the blown fuse with an extra one he had ready and then disconnect the main switch—so that all the evidence would indicate that the lights had been turned off by someone who had pulled the main switch and, therefore, by someone who was standing close to the fuse box at the very moment the lights went out.

"He was back behind the bar when I asked where the fuse box was and he took pains to suggest to me he had been behind the bar all that time by saying that he couldn't find the bar gate in the dark.

"He killed his own dog because it was giving him away. There's only one plausible reason why any dog would enter a strange house uninvited. It must be a house where the dog has lived before with his own master. I knew one case where a dog returned every few days to his old home to the annoyance of the new tenants. If Amory's Loki had started doing that someone was sure to suspect, sooner or later,

that the dog had lived in that house before. And the only previous tenant—besides the Ashleys themselves—was Lucien Delorme, the French jewel thief, who kept a boxer puppy there ten years ago. “Delorme risked bringing the dog back to this neighbourhood because the dog’s appearance had also changed. He was no longer a puppy and he was useful as a watchdog and bodyguard. No doubt Delorme was a dog lover in his own way, but he was also a ruthless criminal who didn’t hesitate to use a knife on human being or animal if he thought he had to in order to save his own skin. He realised what the dog was doing to him the moment Sybilla told her story and, while she and I were still talking, he went down the drive and killed the dog. It was the dog’s own passage through the bayberry bushes that made them quiver earlier that afternoon—not Ehrenthal or anyone else pursuing the dog.”

“Then, if it hadn’t been for the dog, you wouldn’t have suspected . . .”

“Oh, yes, I should. I had begun to suspect Amory was Delorme long before I worked out the evidence of the dog. Though he spoke English entirely without a French accent, even under stress, he still used the word ‘ignore’ as

the French use it. He said, ‘I ignored Mrs. Ehrenthal’s wealth.’ What professional charity organiser would ‘ignore’ wealth in the English sense of the word? He meant: ‘I didn’t know about Mrs. Ehrenthal’s wealth’ and that use of the word ‘ignore’ is definitely French. Also, I asked myself: Why had he sent Mrs. Ehrenthal’s notice of the dance to Box 703 instead of Box 610? Was 703 an old box number for that same house? Miss Ashley has confirmed my suspicion that it was the box number used by Delorme when he was living in the house. That box number was indelibly associated with that house in his subconscious memory and he must have longed nostalgically for the days when he lived there, secure and unsuspected—an unconscious wish that expressed itself in his typographical error. As I’ve so often said, the subconscious is the silent informer who betrays all our secrets, innocent and criminal alike.

“The ten-year-old box number and the French use of the word ‘ignore’ were a sentence in cipher that clearly read: ‘I am a Frenchman and I lived in this house ten years ago.’ After that, all I had to ask myself was: How could Amory make those lights go out when he was standing so far from the main switch?



EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR:

AGATHA CHRISTIE

TITLE:

*Investigation by
Telegram*

TYPE:

“Armchair” Detection

DETECTIVE:

Hercule Poirot

LOCALES:

London and Derbyshire, England

TIME:

A generation ago

COMMENTS:

Ill with the 'flu, the great Poirot must use Captain Hastings as his legman. But detection from a bed is no handicap to Hercule!

“AFTER all,” murmured Poirot, “it is possible that I shall not die this time.”

Coming from a convalescent influenza patient, I hailed the remark as showing a beneficial optimism. I myself had been the first sufferer from the disease. Poirot in his turn had gone down. He was now sitting up in bed, propped up with pillows, his head muffled in a woollen shawl, and was slowly sipping a particularly noxious *tisane* which I had prepared according to his directions. His eye rested with pleasure on a neatly graduated row of medicine bottles which adorned the mantelpiece.

“Yes, yes,” my little friend continued. “Once more shall I be myself again, the great Hercule Poirot, the terror of evil-doers! Figure to yourself, *mon ami*, that I have a little paragraph to myself in *Society Gossip*. But yes! Here

it is! ‘Go it—criminals—all out! Hercule Poirot—and believe me, girls, he’s some Hercules!—our own pet society detective can’t get a grip on you. ‘Cause why? ‘Cause he’s got la grippe himself!’”

I laughed.

“Good for you, Poirot. You are becoming quite a public character. And fortunately you haven’t missed anything of particular interest during this time.”

“That is true. The few cases I have had to decline did not fill me with any regret.”

Our landlady stuck her head in at the door.

“There’s a gentleman downstairs. Says he must see Monsieur Poirot or you, Captain. Seeing as he was in a great to-do—and with all that quite the gentleman—I brought up ‘is card.’”

She handed me the bit of pasteboard. “Mr. Roger Haverling,” I read.

Poirot motioned with his head towards the bookcase, and I obediently pulled forth *Who's Who*. Poirot took it from me and scanned the pages rapidly.

"Second son of fifth Baron Windsor. Married 1913 Zoe, fourth daughter of William Crabbe."

"Hm!" I said. "I rather fancy that's the girl who used to act at the Frivolity—only she called herself Zoe Carrisbrook. I remember she married some young man-about-town just before the War."

"Would it interest you, Hastings, to go down and hear what our visitor's particular little trouble is? Make him all my excuses."

Roger Havering was a man of about forty, well set up and of smart appearance. His face, however, was haggard, and he was evidently labouring under great agitation.

"Captain Hastings? You are Monsieur Poirot's partner, I understand. It is imperative that he should come with me to Derbyshire today."

"I'm afraid that's impossible," I responded. "Poirot is ill in bed—influenza."

His face fell.

"Dear me, that is a great blow to me."

"The matter on which you want to consult him is serious?"

"My God, yes! My uncle, the best friend I have in the world, was foully murdered last night."

"Here in London?"

"No, in Derbyshire. I was in town and received a telegram from my wife this morning.

Immediately upon its receipt I determined to come round and beg Monsieur Poirot to undertake the case."

"If you will excuse me a minute," I said, struck by a sudden idea.

I rushed upstairs, and in a few brief words acquainted Poirot with the situation. He took any further words out of my mouth.

"I see. I see. You want to go yourself, is it not so? Well, why not? You should know my methods by now. All I ask is that you should report to me fully every day, and follow implicitly any instructions I may wire you."

To this I willingly agreed.

An hour later I was sitting opposite Mr. Havering in a first-class carriage on the Midland Railway, speeding rapidly away from London.

"To begin with, Captain Hastings, you must understand that Hunter's Lodge, where we are going, and where the tragedy took place, is only a small shooting-box in the heart of the Derbyshire moors. Our real home is near Newmarket, and we usually rent a flat in town for the season. Hunter's Lodge is looked after by a housekeeper who is quite capable of doing all we need when we run down for an occasional week end. Of course, during the shooting season, we take down some of our own servants from Newmarket. My uncle, Mr. Harrington Pace—as you may know, my mother was a Miss Pace of New York—has, for the last three years, made his home with us. He never got on well with my father,

or my elder brother, and I suspect that my being somewhat of a prodigal son myself rather increased than diminished his affection towards me. Of course I am a poor man, and my uncle was a rich one—in other words, he paid the piper! But, though exacting in many ways, he was not really hard to get on with, and we all three lived very harmoniously together. Two days ago my uncle, rather wearied with some recent gaieties of ours in town, suggested that we should run down to Derbyshire for a day or two. My wife telegraphed to Mrs. Middleton, the housekeeper, and we went down that same afternoon. Yesterday evening I was forced to return to town, but my wife and my uncle remained on. This morning I received this telegram."

He handed it over to me:

COME AT ONCE UNCLE HARRINGTON MURDERED LAST NIGHT BRING GOOD DETECTIVE IF YOU CAN BUT DO COME—ZOE.

"Then as yet you know no details?"

"No, I suppose it will be in the evening papers. Without doubt the police are in charge."

It was about three o'clock when we arrived at the little station of Elmer's Dale. From there a five-mile drive brought us to a small greystone building in the midst of the rugged moors.

"A lonely place," I observed with a shiver.

Havering nodded. "I shall try and get rid of it. I could never live here again."

We unlatched the gate and were walking up the narrow path to the oak door when a familiar figure emerged and came to meet us.

"Japp!" I exclaimed.

The Scotland Yard Inspector grinned at me in a friendly fashion before addressing my companion.

"Mr. Havering, I think? I've been sent down from London to take charge of this case, and I'd like a word with you, if I may, sir."

"My wife——"

"I've seen your good lady, sir—and the housekeeper. I won't keep you a moment, but I'm anxious to get back to the village now that I've seen all there is to see here."

"I know nothing as to what——"

"Ex-actly," said Japp soothingly. "But there are just one or two little points I'd like your opinion about all the same. Captain Hastings here, he knows me, and he'll go on up to the house and tell them you're coming. What have you done with the little man, by the way, Captain Hastings?"

"He's ill in bed with influenza."

"Is he now? I'm sorry to hear that. Rather the case of the cart without the horse, your being here without him, isn't it?"

And on his rather ill-timed jest I went on to the house. I rang the bell, as Japp had closed the door behind him. After some moments it was opened by a middle-aged woman in black.

"Mr. Havering will be here in

a moment, I explained. "He has been detained by the Inspector. I have come down with him from London to look into the case. Perhaps you can tell me briefly what occurred last night."

"Come inside, sir." She closed the door behind me, and we stood in the dimly-lighted hall. "It was after dinner last night, sir, that the man came. He asked to see Mr. Pace, sir, and, seeing that he spoke the same way, I thought it was an American gentleman friend of Mr. Pace's and I showed him into the gun-room, and then went to tell Mr. Pace. He wouldn't give any name, which, of course, was a bit odd, now I come to think of it. I told Mr. Pace, and he seemed puzzled like, but he said to the mistress: 'Excuse me, Zoe, while I just see what this fellow wants.' He went off to the gun-room, and I went back to the kitchen, but after a while I heard loud voices, as if they were quarrelling, and I came out into the hall. At the same time, the mistress she comes out too, and just then there was a shot and then a dreadful silence. We both ran to the gunroom door, but it was locked and we had to go round to the window. It was open, and there inside was Mr. Pace, all shot and bleeding."

"What became of the man?"

"He must have got away through the window, sir, before we got to it."

"And then?"

"Mrs. Havering sent me to fetch the police. Five miles to walk it was. They came back with me, and the constable he stayed all night, and this morning the police

gentleman from London arrived."

"What was this man like who called to see Mr. Pace?"

The housekeeper reflected.

"He had a black beard, sir, and was about middle-aged, and had on a light overcoat. Beyond the fact that he spoke like an American I didn't notice much about him."

"I see. Now I wonder if I can see Mrs. Havering?"

"She's upstairs, sir. Shall I tell her?"

"If you please. Tell her that Mr. Havering is outside with Inspector Japp, and that the gentleman he has brought back with him from London is anxious to speak to her as soon as possible."

"Very good, sir."

I was in a fever of impatience to get at all the facts. Japp had two or three hours' start of me, and his anxiety to be gone made me keen to be close at his heels.

Mrs. Havering did not keep me waiting long. In a few minutes I heard a light step descending the stairs, and looked up to see a very handsome young woman coming towards me. She wore a flame-coloured jumper that set off the slender boyishness of her figure. On her dark head was a little hat of flame-coloured leather. Even the present tragedy could not dim the vitality of her personality.

I introduced myself, and she nodded in quick comprehension.

"Of course I have often heard of you and your colleague, Monsieur Poirot. You have done some wonderful things together, haven't you? It was very clever of my hus-

band to get you so promptly. Now will you ask me questions? That is the easiest way, isn't it, of getting to know all you want to about this dreadful affair?"

"Thank you, Mrs. Havering. Now what time was it that this man arrived?"

"It must have been just before nine o'clock. We had finished dinner and were sitting over our coffee and cigarettes."

"Your husband had already left for London?"

"Yes, he went up by the 6.15."

"Did he go by car to the station, or did he walk?"

"Our own car isn't down here. One came out from the garage in Elmer's Dale to fetch him in time for the train."

"Was Mr. Pace quite his usual self?"

"Absolutely. Most normal in every way."

"Now, can you describe this visitor at all?"

"I'm afraid not. I didn't see him. Mrs. Middleton showed him straight into the gun-room and then came to tell my uncle."

"What did your uncle say?"

"He seemed rather annoyed, but went off at once. It was about five minutes later that I heard the sound of raised voices. I ran out into the hall and almost collided with Mrs. Middleton. Then we heard the shot. The gun-room door was locked on the inside, and we had to go right round the house to the window. Of course that took some time, and the murderer had been able to get well away. My poor uncle"—her voice faltered—"had been shot through

the head. I saw at once that he was dead. I sent Mrs. Middleton for the police. I was careful to touch nothing in the room but to leave it exactly as I found it."

I nodded approval. "Now, as to the weapon?"

"Well, I can make a guess at it, Captain Hastings. A pair of revolvers of my husband's were mounted on the wall. One of them is missing. I pointed this out to the police, and they took the other one away with them. When they have extracted the bullet, I suppose they will know for certain."

"May I go to the gun-room?"

"Certainly. The police have finished with it. But the body has been removed."

She accompanied me to the scene of the crime. At that moment Havering entered the hall, and with a quick apology his wife ran to him. I was left to undertake my investigations alone.

I may as well confess at once that they were rather disappointing. In detective novels clues usually abound, but here I could find nothing that struck me as out of the ordinary except a large bloodstain on the carpet where I judged the dead man had fallen. I examined everything with painstaking care and took a couple of pictures of the room with my little camera which I had brought with me. I also examined the ground outside the window, but it appeared to have been so heavily trampled underfoot that I judged it was useless to waste time over it. No, I had seen all that Hunter's Lodge had to show me. I must go back to Elmer's Dale and get into touch

with Japp. Accordingly I took leave of the Haverings, and was driven off in the car that had brought us up from the station.

I found Japp at the Matlock Arms and he took me to see the body. Harrington Pace was a small, spare, clean-shaven man, typically American in appearance. He had been shot through the back of the head, and the revolver had been discharged at close quarters.

"Turned away for a moment," remarked Japp, "and the other fellow snatched up a revolver and shot him. The one Mrs. Havering handed over to us was fully loaded and I suppose the other one was also. Curious what darn fool things people do. Fancy keeping two loaded revolvers hanging up on your wall."

"What do you think of the case?" I asked, as we left the gruesome chamber.

"Well, I'd got my eye on Havering to begin with. Oh, yes!" noting my exclamation of astonishment. "Havering has one or two shady incidents in his past. When he was a boy at Oxford there was some funny business about the signature on one of his father's cheques. All hushed up of course. Then, he's pretty heavily in debt now, and they're the kind of debts he wouldn't like to go to his uncle about, whereas you may be sure the uncle's will would be in his favour. Yes, I'd got my eye on him, and that's why I wanted to speak to him before he saw his wife, but their statements dovetail all right, and I've been to the station and there's no doubt what-

ever that he left by the 6.15. That gets up to London about 10.30. He went straight to his club, he says, and if that's confirmed—why, he couldn't have been shooting his uncle here at nine o'clock in a black beard!"

"Ah, yes, I was going to ask you what you thought about that beard?"

Japp winked. "I think it grew pretty fast—grew in the five miles from Elmer's Dale to Hunter's Lodge. Americans that I've met are mostly clean-shaven. Yes, it's amongst Mr. Pace's American associates that we'll have to look for the murderer. I questioned the housekeeper first, and then her mistress, and their stories agree all right, but I'm sorry Mrs. Havering didn't get a look at the fellow. She's a smart woman, and she might have noticed something that would have set us on the track."

I sat down and wrote a lengthy account to Poirot. I was able to add various further items of information before I posted the letter.

The bullet had been extracted and was proved to have been fired from a revolver similar to the one held by the police. Furthermore, Mr. Havering's movements on the night in question had been checked and verified, and it was proved beyond doubt that he had actually arrived in London by the train in question. And, thirdly, a sensational development had occurred. A city gentleman, living at Ealing, on crossing Haven Green to get to the District Railway Station that morning, had observed a brown-paper parcel

stuck between the railings. Opening it, he found that it contained a revolver. He handed the parcel over to the local police station, and before night it was proved to be the one we were in search of, the mate of that given us by Mrs. Havering. One bullet had been fired from it.

All this I added to my report. A telegram from Poirot arrived while I was at breakfast the following morning:

OF COURSE BLACK BEARDED MAN WAS NOT HAVERING ONLY YOU OR JAPP WOULD HAVE SUCH AN IDEA WIRE ME DESCRIPTION OF HOUSEKEEPER AND WHAT CLOTHES SHE WORE THIS MORNING SAME OF MRS. HAVERING DO NOT WASTE TIME TAKING PHOTOGRAPHS OF INTERIOR THEY ARE UNDEREXPOSED AND NOT IN THE LEAST ARTISTIC.

It seemed to me that Poirot's style was unnecessarily facetious. I also fancied he was a shade jealous of my position on the spot with full facilities for handling the case. His request for a description of the clothes worn by the two women appeared to me to be simply ridiculous, but I complied as well as I, a mere man, was able to.

At eleven a reply came from Poirot:

ADVISE JAPP ARREST HOUSEKEEPER BEFORE IT IS TOO LATE.

Dumbfounded, I took the wire to Japp. He swore softly under his breath.

"He's the goods, Monsieur Poirot! If he says so, there's something in it. And I hardly

noticed the woman. I don't know that I can go so far as arresting her, but I'll have her watched. We'll go up right away and take another look at her."

But it was too late. Mrs. Middleton, that quiet middle-aged woman, who had appeared so normal and respectable, had vanished into thin air. Her box had been left behind. It contained only ordinary wearing apparel. There was no clue in it to her whereabouts.

From Mrs. Havering we elicited all the facts we could:

"I engaged her about three weeks ago when Mrs. Emery, our former housekeeper, left. She came to me from Mrs. Selbourne's Agency in Mount Street—a very well-known place. I get all my servants from there. They sent several women to see me, but this Mrs. Middleton seemed much the nicest, and had splendid references. I engaged her on the spot, and notified the Agency of the fact. I can't believe that there was anything wrong with her. She was such a nice quiet woman."

The thing was certainly a mystery. While it was clear that the woman herself could not have committed the crime, since at the moment the shot was fired Mrs. Havering was with her in the hall, nevertheless she must have some connection with the murder, or why should she suddenly take to her heels and bolt?

I wired the latest development to Poirot and suggested returning to London and making inquiries at Selbourne's Agency.

Poirot's reply was prompt:

USELESS TO INQUIRE AT AGENCY THEY WILL NEVER HAVE HEARD OF HER FIND OUT WHAT VEHICLE TOOK HER UP TO HUNTERS LODGE WHEN SHE FIRST ARRIVED THERE.

Though mystified, I was obedient. The means of transport in Elmer's Dale were limited. The local garage had two battered cars, and there were two station flies. None of these had been requisitioned on the date of the housekeeper's arrival. Questioned, Mrs. Havering explained that she had given the woman the money for her fare down to Derbyshire and sufficient to hire a car or fly to take her up to Hunter's Lodge. There was usually one of the cars at the station on the chance of its being required. Taking into consideration the further fact that nobody at the station had noticed the arrival of a stranger, black-bearded or otherwise, on the fatal evening, everything seemed to point to the conclusion that the murderer had come to the spot in a car, which had been waiting near at hand to aid his escape, and that the same car had brought the mysterious housekeeper to her new post.

I may mention that inquiries at the Agency in London bore out Poirot's prognostication. No such woman as Mrs. Middleton had ever been on their books. They had received the Hon. Mrs. Havering's application for a housekeeper, and had sent her various applicants for the post. When she sent them the engagement fee, she omitted to mention which woman she had selected.

Somewhat crestfallen, I re-

turned to London. I found Poirot established in an armchair by the fire in a garish silk dressing gown. He greeted me with much affection.

"*Mon ami* Hastings! But how glad I am to see you. Veritably I have for you a great affection! And you have enjoyed yourself? You have run to and fro with the good Japp? You have interrogated and investigated to your heart's content?"

"Poirot," I cried, "the thing's a dark mystery! It will never be solved."

"It is true that we are not likely to cover ourselves with glory over it."

"No, indeed. It's a hard nut to crack."

"Oh, as far as that goes, I am very good at cracking the nuts! A veritable squirrel! It is not that which embarrasses me. I know well enough who killed Mr. Harrington Pace."

"You know? How did you find out?"

"Your illuminating answers to my wires supplied me with the truth. See here, Hastings, let us examine the facts methodically and in order. Mr. Harrington Pace is a man with considerable fortune which at his death will doubtless pass to his nephew. Point No. 1. His nephew is known to be desperately hard up. Point No. 2. His nephew is also known to be—shall we say a man of rather loose moral fiber? Point No. 3."

"But Roger Havering is proved to have journeyed straight up to London."

"*Précisément*—and therefore, as

Mr. Havering left Elmer's Dale at 6.15, and since Mr. Pace cannot have been killed before he left, we conclude quite rightly that Mr. Havering did *not* shoot his uncle. But there is a Mrs. Havering, Hastings."

"Impossible! The housekeeper was with her when the shot was fired."

"Ah, yes, the housekeeper. But she has disappeared."

"She will be found."

"I think not. There is something peculiarly elusive about that housekeeper, don't you think so, Hastings? It struck me at once."

"She played her part, I suppose, and then got out in the nick of time."

"And what was her part?"

"Well, presumably to admit her confederate, the black-bearded man."

"Oh, no, that was not her part! Her part was what you have just mentioned—to provide an alibi for Mrs. Havering at the moment the shot was fired. And no one will ever find her, *mon ami*, because she does not exist! 'There's no such person,' as your so great Shakespeare says."

"It was Dickens," I murmured, unable to suppress a smile. "But what do you mean, Poirot?"

"I mean that Zoe Havering was an actress before her marriage, that you and Japp only saw the housekeeper in a dark hall, a dim middle-aged figure in black with a faint subdued voice, and finally that neither you nor Japp, nor the local police whom the housekeeper fetched, ever saw Mrs. Middleton and her mistress at one and the

same time! It was child's play for that clever woman. On the pretext of summoning her mistress she runs upstairs, slips on a bright jumper and a hat with black curls attached which she jams down over the grey transformation. A few deft touches and the make-up is removed, a slight dusting of rouge, and the brilliant Zoe Havering comes down with her clear ringing voice. Nobody looks particularly at the housekeeper. Why should they? There is nothing to connect her with the crime. She, too, has an alibi."

"But the revolver that was found at Ealing? Mrs. Havering could not have placed it there?"

"No, that was Roger Havering's job—but it was a mistake on their part. It put me on the right track. A man who has committed a murder with a revolver which he found on the spot would fling it away at once—he would not carry it up to London with him. No, the motive was clear, the criminals wished to focus the interest of the police on a spot far removed from Derbyshire; they were anxious to get the police away as soon as possible from the vicinity of Hunter's Lodge. Of course the revolver found at Ealing was not the one with which Mr. Pace was shot. Roger Havering discharged one shot from it, brought it up to London, went straight to his club to establish his alibi, then went quickly out to Ealing, a matter of about twenty minutes only, placed the parcel where it was found, and so back to town. That charming creature, his wife, quietly shoots Mr. Pace after

dinner—you remember he was shot from behind?—reloads the revolver and puts it back in its place, and then starts off with her desperate little comedy.”

“It’s incredible,” I murmured, “and yet—”

“And yet it is true. *Bien sur*, my friend, it is true. But to bring that precious pair to justice, that is another matter. Well, Japp must do what he can—I have written him fully—but I very much fear, Hastings, that we shall be obliged to leave them to Fate, or *le bon Dieu*, whichever you prefer.”

“The wicked flourish, like a

green bay tree,” I reminded him.

“But at a price, Hastings, always at a price, *croyez-moi!*”

Poirot’s forebodings were confirmed. Japp, though convinced of the truth of his theory, was unable to get together the necessary evidence to insure a conviction.

Mr. Pace’s huge fortune passed into the hands of his murderers. Nevertheless, Nemesis did overtake them, and when I read in the paper that the Hon. Roger and Mrs. Havering were among those killed in the crash of a private plane to Paris I knew that justice was satisfied.



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A New Story by

HUGH PENTECOST

AUTHOR:

TITLE:

Hunting Bay

TYPE:

Detective Story

PROTAGONIST:

Uncle George Crowder

LOCALE:

Lakeview, United States

TIME:

The Present

COMMENTS:

A tale of dogs and hunting and a twelve-year-old boy and a town that laughed at a secret joke . . . until the joke turned on itself and wasn't funny any more.

EDITORS' FILE CARD

THE death of Fred Simmons of natural causes would have been taken by the town of Lakeview as a downright blessing. His death by violence might not have resulted in open congratulations being exchanged in front of the post office, but the prosecution in a murder trial would have had a hard time finding co-operative witnesses. However, when Fred Simmons was murdered, the town was stunned. For a week before the murder the town had been laughing at a joke on Simmons, but suddenly the joke turned on Lakeview and left it confronted by a kind of horror that was hard to endure.

Fred Simmons's personality was obnoxious to the townspeople, even without totalling up a bill of particulars against him. He was rich, which is not a sin, but he would foreclose a mortgage with-

out mercy. People said he would have lowered the boom on his own grandmother, which is probably true. His clothes were over-fancy for Lakeview; his sports car was custom-built, but he would never give local kids a ride in it; he raised hunting dogs, training them himself, but his approach to a sensitive animal was so brutal and heavy-handed that none of his dogs was ever any good under a gun.

Specifically, the bill of particulars against Simmons was even grimmer. It was said that Esther Quayle, a well-liked if somewhat flighty young girl, had drowned herself in the old quarry because Simmons wouldn't "do the right thing" by her. It was said that old man Humboldt, who had been a teller in the bank for years, had stolen bank funds because Simmons had put pressure on him to pay a usurious loan. Nobody

ever knew for sure because Humboldt died of a heart attack in jail before he could be brought to trial. Then there was the beating it was believed Simmons had given old George Crowder.

George Crowder was a character. He came from one of the oldest and best families in town. He had been well educated, was graduated from law school with honours, had built himself a fine practice in the county and eventually became State's Attorney. Uncle George, as everyone called him now, had a keen wit and on the side was one of the best woodsmen the town has ever known. He always had a fine dog, and he knew and loved the woods and its creatures better than most men know their own children.

They said George Crowder would be governor one day, but it never came about. George Crowder had been the prosecutor in a famous local murder trial. He had got his conviction and the guilty man had gone to the chair. Only it turned out, almost a year later, that the accused man hadn't been guilty. A confession and corroborative evidence proved it beyond question. The day after it was certain, George Crowder closed his law office and disappeared from Lakeview for a long time. Rumour came back that somewhere he was drinking himself to death. When, eventually, he did return to Lakeview he was a changed man. The sparkle was gone. He was still gentle, but now he was silent. It was said that he had to come back because he'd run out of money. It was said too

that his sister, who was married to Hec Trimble the druggist, was supporting him. George built a little cabin in the woods, a mile off the main road, and lived there alone, with his setter dog, Timmy.

George Crowder was liked. He was well-liked. One day, shortly after Esther Quayle's suicide, George Crowder met Simmons in front of the post office. He told Simmons off. Simmons, in his imported hunting jacket, merely grinned at George and walked away. But that night someone broke into Crowder's cabin and nearly beat him to death. Old George would never open his mouth about it; he swore he never saw who attacked him. But no one in Lakeview had any doubt that his attacker was Fred Simmons.

The day Simmons was murdered a coincidence was involved. Three men with first-class motives for killing Simmons appeared at the scene of the crime not ten minutes after it was committed. They were George Crowder, and Bob Landgrove who had been engaged to Esther Quayle before Simmons got in the picture, and Pete Humboldt, old man Humboldt's son, who always said, "Simmons might just as well have put a gun to Pop's head and shot him!" It was a coincidence that they all came, because it seemed certain that none of them was guilty. That was the horror of it—for everything pointed to the fact that Simmons had been murdered by a twelve-year-old boy.

Which brings us to the joke—the joke on Simmons.

People in a small town love to chew on human foibles, particularly if they reveal little vanities or false prides. Hector Trimble, the druggist, was a respected and trusted man. He did a good business, kept a good modern store, and was a first-rate pharmacist. Hector, however, was just a shade pettish. He had a phobia about dirt—quite proper, you might say, in his line of business. He washed his hands at least twenty-five times a day. Also quite proper, you might say. And he would not allow his small son, Joey, to have any pets. Dog or cat hairs were anathema to him—they might wind up in somebody's prescription. Nothing wrong with Hector's ban on pets, except that he made such a constant point of it.

And that wasn't all. A cross, which was almost more than Hector could bear, was his wife's brother—George Crowder. Mind you, the druggist never complained about George's shiftless way of life. He complained about old George's dog. And everyone was sure that it pretty nearly killed Hec that his twelve-year-old son, Joey, idolised his Uncle George and spent every free hour he had with the old man and his setter dog, Timmy. Maybe it was true, the townspeople admitted, that Joey was learning shiftlessness from the old man, but he had also learned at the age of twelve, to be one of the best shots in the country, and he could handle Timmy in the field like a professional. It must be said for Hector Trimble that he didn't put down his foot on this association.

Maybe this was one area where the otherwise meek Mrs. Trimble showed unexpected stubbornness. There was no doubt she loved her brother George, remembered his days of glory, and loved him none the less in his decline.

The joke began rather unpleasantly. By cutting innumerable lawns Joey Trimble had acquired a new gun. The day he got the gun Joey went out into the woods to try it. He was getting ready to shoot at an improvised target set up against a sandbank in the woods when he heard someone firing a heavy-gauge shotgun not far away. There were several shots, and then Joey heard a man shouting angrily, and then a scream of pain, as if a small child was being hurt. Joey went scurrying toward the sounds and stopped at the edge of a clearing where they came from. There he saw Fred Simmons, tall, blonde, pretty like a movie actor, wearing his imported shooting jacket. Simmons had laid his gun down on a log, and he had a dog on a chain leash. The dog was an English setter, and he could have been Timmy's double in size and colouring, but he was cowering and whimpering, and he had no pride like Timmy. Simmons had the leash in his left hand and a leather whip in his right hand, and he was lashing the dog unmercifully.

"Act gun-shy on me, will you?" Simmons was shouting. The dog tried to move away and Simmons jerked the leash. Joey saw a force collar on the dog's neck. A force collar is a slip collar with spikes on the inside. When you yank on

it the spikes bite into the dog's neck. Uncle George had told Joey only an expert trainer should be allowed to use one, unless you wanted to ruin the dog. It was typical of Simmons he would have everything—force collar, leash, whip, and a dog whistle hanging around his neck on a chain.

Simmons didn't see Joey. He didn't know he was there until Joey grabbed at his arm.

"You leave that dog alone!" Joey cried, and was ashamed of the tears running down his cheeks. Simmons glared at him and tried to shake Joey off.

Joey hung on tight and Simmons tried again to push him away. He hit Joey hard with the heel of his hand, right on the breastbone, and Joey felt his wind go. He knew he couldn't hang on to Simmons's whip arm much longer, so he bent down and bit Simmons's hand as hard as he could. Simmons let out a yell you could have heard a mile away. Then he really punched Joey with his left hand and Joey fell down and waited to be killed. Simmons stood over him, his whip raised. Joey had one last consolation. Simmons had loosened his hold on the leash and suddenly the dog slipped out of the cruel force collar and streaked away across the clearing. Well, I've saved him, anyway, Joey thought, waiting for the whip to come down on him.

Simmons's eyes were like two bright new dimes. "You're George Crowder's nephew, aren't you?" he asked.

Joey was really scared then, be-

cause he knew Simmons hated his Uncle George.

Simmons hesitated. "Get out of here," he said, lowering his whip arm. "And stay out of here. Because when I find that lily-livered dog I'm going to blow his brains out."

That's when the joke began to get funny.

Joey hightailed it for Uncle George's cabin to tell him what had happened. When he got there Uncle George and Timmy were away, but crouched near the front steps was a dog that looked like Timmy. It was Simmons's dog, his back streaked from the whip lashes, his neck and throat bleeding from the teeth of the force collar. Joey thought the dog would run, but he lay still, shaking. Joey petted him and whispered to him. He got some water and food from the cabin, and after the dog had gulped both down he put his head in Joey's lap, gave a long shiver and went to sleep. George Crowder and Timmy found them that way an hour later.

Then George and Joey had a debate about ethics. Should they return the dog? Joey contended Simmons didn't deserve the dog, any dog. Uncle George pointed out, dryly, that it wasn't them that deserved who usually got. Still, Uncle George said, chewing on a straw, they didn't owe Simmons anything. They didn't have to take the dog back to him. Of course, if he came after it—

And that was when the joke got really funny. Every day Simmons went out in the woods, looking for his dog, armed with his whip,

chain, and force collar, and his rifle. And every day the dog just accidentally got shut in Uncle George's woodshed. When Simmons was not in the woods Joey would take the dog out and work him. Of course, the dog had some training, but under Joey's expert hand he began to blossom. He'd answer to hand signals, he'd walk for miles at heel, and he had fine initiative when he was turned loose. He'd hold like a statue under a shot—when Joey fired it. Everybody in town seemed to know about it but Simmons, and everybody in Lakeview thought it was a wonderful joke.

Simmons came after his dog on the day he was murdered. He came at a different time of day than usual, which was a factor in the case. The bird season had just opened and there were hunters in the woods. Joey might not have been out with Timmy Two if Simmons had come searching at his usual time.

George Crowder had started out much earlier in the day, and he and Timmy One were somewhere to the east of the clearing, heading home. Pete Humboldt and Sheriff Egan were off to the south, hunting over the Sheriff's black Labrador. Somewhere to the west was Bob Landgrove, who had loved Esther Quayle, with his father, old Amos Landgrove. Amos was something of a tragic figure. He'd been a fine cabinet-maker in his day, but arthritis had struck him cruelly, and his once skilled hands were knotted and swollen so badly that he couldn't even feed himself or light his own

pipe. Old Amos had just come along for the walk; he couldn't shoot a gun.

They all told much the same story afterwards. They all heard a shot, then a scream like someone in mortal agony. Before any of them could reach the clearing they heard a second shot.

Sheriff Egan was the first to reach the scene. What he saw made his blood run cold. Fred Simmons lay near a stone wall that had a little strand of wire stretched across the top of it. His gun lay a few feet from him. There was a hole blown in Simmons' chest as big around as a stovepipe. But the thing that really raised the hair on Egan's neck was the dog. Timmy Two was crouched beside Simmons, and the Sheriff could see that Simmons's throat had been chewed on till it looked like hamburger meat.

Egan wasn't too sure about who arrived next. He thought it was Pete Humboldt, but it might have been old Amos Landgrove, or maybe his son Bob. They all came about the same time. He knew it was Pete Humboldt who started towards the body.

"Hold on, Pete," Egan said. "Don't go near that dog. He's turned killer. Let me put a slug in him first."

Then it was that Joey yelled. "No, Mr. Egan! No! Please!" Joey was running towards them from the north.

"Stand back, kid. You see what the dog has done," the Sheriff said.

Joey stopped, frozen with horror, as Egan started to raise the

gun again. It never got to his shoulder because another actor appeared on the scene. George Crowder's voice was sharp. "Put that gun down, Sheriff, or I'll blow it out of your hands."

"And, by God, I think he meant it," Egan said afterwards.

That moment of inaction gave Joey a chance to reach Timmy Two. He dropped beside the dog and cradled him in his arms. "Look, Mr. Egan," he said. "Not a drop of blood on his muzzle or jowls. Not anywhere! Not one drop."

Uncle George, his deeply lined face pale as parchment, joined the rest in staring down at the dog. "Joey's right," he said. "The dog never touched him."

Old Amos Landgrove, his knobby hands trembling, spoke up. "Seems simple enough. Simmons was climbing the wall, tripped over that wire, and got shot with his own gun."

The Sheriff picked up Simmons's gun and sniffed the barrel. "It's been fired all right," he said. "But this gun never killed him, Amos. This is a rifle. That hole was blown in him by a heavy-gauge shotgun." An idea had crept into the front of Egan's mind and he tried to wipe it away. But he couldn't. "He was hunting for that dog again," he said. "You can see that—whip, whistle. I guess he found him this time." The five men looked at each other, and then with a kind of horror coming over them they all looked down at Joey—Joey cuddling the dog in his arms.

"Did you shoot him, Joey?"

Uncle George asked very quietly. "Tell the truth, boy. We'll figure out what to do."

Joey's eyes were bugging out, and he was unable to speak.

"Somebody better go for the State Troopers," Pete Humboldt muttered.

The joke was over.

"We all wished the so-and-so dead," Egan said later. "But not that way. Not with that kid's life ruined—a good kid like Joey Trimble. All the same, if I'd been the boy, and I'd seen Simmons going after that dog again, and if I'd had a gun in my hands—"

It was Uncle George who broke the sick silence. He spoke to Joey, and he spoke with a kind of grave courtesy.

"Joey, I don't know how to apologise to you for being such a damn fool for about thirty seconds," he said, "but I shall spend the rest of my life trying to make it up to you." He turned to Sheriff Egan and his pale blue eyes had a glint in them. "Look here," he said. "We're supposed to be old woodsmen, not old women. Something's been dragged along the ground here." He led the way and they followed, to a spot in the centre of the clearing where the weeds and grass were all matted down and there was blood on the ground, plenty of blood. "Simmons was shot here," Uncle George went on, "and then his body was dragged over to the wall to make it look as if he tripped over the wire and fell. His gun was fired off. I made a mental note of it at the time and forgot it. Shotgun blast—scream—then a

few minutes later, a rifle shot." Uncle George raised his pale blue eyes to old Amos Landgrove. "How did you manage to fire Simmons's gun, Amos? Stick of wood through the trigger guard?"

They all stared at Uncle George as if he'd gone off his rocker—all except old Amos, who smiled very faintly. Bob Landgrove took a quick step towards Uncle George.

"Why, you old——"

"Easy, son," old Amos said.

"You may have been the great legal mind of your day, George," Sheriff Egan said, "but when you accuse Amos——"

"Look at Simmons," Uncle George said. "Something is missing. Dog whistle, whip, gun. But where is his leash and the force collar? You been laughing about it all week. He carried it out here every day. Where is it now?" He turned to old Amos again. "What did you do with it, Amos? Throw it over the other side of the wall somewhere?"

"Wait a minute," Bob Landgrove said. "I won't stand for——"

"I'm sorry, Bob," Uncle George said, wearily. "We all come in here and see Simmons, shot in the chest. His neck is chewed up and a dog is lying beside him, a dog that hated him. And a boy is hanging around nearby with a shotgun, a boy who hated him. So we all say, the boy killed him and the dog chewed up his throat! God forgive us. Nobody chewed his throat! The body was dragged over here from

where the killing happened. How would you drag it, Sheriff? Or you, Bob? Or me? We'd take him under the arms and we'd pull him."

"Well, how was he dragged?" Bob Landgrove asked.

"The force collar," Uncle George said. "It was slipped over his head and he was dragged that way—pulled by the leash. And the spikes of the collar bit into his neck. Amos had to pull him that way because he can't use his hands. He had to loop the leash over his shoulders and pull. That it, Amos?"

"That's about it," old Amos said, the faint smile still on his lips. "I shot him out there in the clearing. It had to look like an accident. So I dragged him over here—just the way you said, George. And I fired off his gun, just the way you said, with a piece of wood in the trigger guard." He looked straight at Uncle George. "You don't have to be told why, George. You know what he did to Esther Quayle. Fine girl, Bob's girl. Simmons killed her. Wrecked Bob's life. I always swore some day I'd get him. It doesn't matter. I'm no good to anyone any more. Can't even button my own pants. I'm glad I done it——"

"Father!" Bob Landgrove's voice was a shocked whisper.

"——and I only wish I hadn't been so stupid. Should have noticed his gun was a rifle, and mine was a——"

"Yes, Amos?" Uncle George said, softly. "Where is your gun, Amos? And what kind of a gun is it? And you're dead right. Amos

—you can't button your own pants and you can't fire a gun—not to aim it at anyone and hit a bull's-eye. You didn't kill him, Amos. You just set the stage afterwards.”

Bob Landgrove seemed to forget that anyone was there but his father. “You saw me shoot him, Father, and you did all that?”

Tears ran down old Amos's cheeks. “I did my best for you, son,” he said. “I'd of gladly took the blame for you.”

Nobody spoke for a minute, then Uncle George said, “Now I guess somebody better go for the troopers.”

“What I don't understand,” Sheriff Egan said, “is what that dog was doing there!”

Uncle George pointed to the whistle hanging around Simmons's neck. “Silent dog whistle,” he

said. “Simmons probably kept on blowing it. Of course, we didn't hear it. But the dog did.”

“But the dog hated Simmons. Why would he answer Simmons's whistle?” the Sheriff asked.

Uncle George looked down at Joey Trimble. “Show him, Joey.”

From his shirt pocket Joey took a duplicate of Simmons's whistle and handed it to the Sheriff.

“Bought it for Joey a couple of days ago,” Uncle George said.

“Dog wasn't sure about it, but he knew it meant come. So he went to it and waited for orders—even if Simmons was lying there. That dog is trying awfully hard to do what Joey asks him to. He got a little mixed up, is all.” He looked down at the boy. “Come along, Joey, and bring your dog. I'll start apologising on the way.”



EDITORS' FILE CARD

| | |
|------------|---|
| AUTHORS: | Frances and Richard Lockridge |
| TITLE: | <i>Dead Boys Don't Remember</i> |
| TYPE: | Detective Story |
| DETECTIVE: | Captain Heimrich |
| LOCALE: | Van Brunt, New York |
| TIME: | The Present |
| COMMENTS: | <i>Captain Heimrich's professional concern was with murder. That's why he was called in on the kidnapping of a ten-year-old boy—because dead boys tell no tales . . .</i> |

THE bus stopped at the head of Blueberry Lane and red warning lights blinked fore and aft. Behind it, two cars halted obediently, and then a third came round the bend of the state road and stopped, too. One car, with equal obedience, pulled up facing the blue and yellow school bus, and that was at 3.20 of a Friday afternoon in late May.

Rodney Burke got off the bus, carrying his school books. He was towheaded and sturdy and a few months more than ten years old. The boys and girls who remained in the bus made shrill sounds, as if something very exciting were happening.

There was nothing actually exciting under way—School Bus No. 3, of District No. 1, had made its scheduled stop at Blueberry

Lane, so that Rodney Burke could get off and walk half a mile along a shaded, little-used road to the sprawling white house he lived in. It was the back way home; the conventional way was by the town road which paralleled the state road, and it was on the town road that the Franklin Burke house fronted—fronted distantly, as became so large a house, so deep in spreading lawns.

Several of the boys and girls yelled, “Bye, Rod!” as if he were going on a long journey from which return was improbable. Rod waved and yelled back—yelled “Bye, kids,” as if this were indeed a parting.

The road curved after a hundred yards or so and Rodney Burke—walking in the middle of the roadway, wearing a striped

shirt and denim trousers and sneakers—went around the bend in the lane, out of sight from the state road. But the bus had pulled away by then.

It takes a boy of ten varying times to walk half a mile on a shady lane, depending on how much of a hurry he is in and, of course, on what shows up.

But Rod was seldom a boy to dawdle; he was a boy of projects, most of which involved building something. Usually he came up the garage drive—sometimes running—within ten minutes after the bus stopped, and one could set clocks by the bus.

Janice Burke was working in her annual garden, partly because it needed weeding—as didn't it always?—and partly because it was an experience of infinite sweetness to see her son coming along the drive, with the afternoon sun bright on his hair. Janice was a little flushed—it was quite warm for May—and she was a little older than most mothers of boys of ten.

The Burkes had waited a dozen years before they had had a child, so that Rodney had seemed rather a miracle. He still did. They tried, of course, not to let him know it, nor make too much of an only child. "We mustn't fuss over him," they told each other, and usually managed not to.

Is it "fussing" over a boy to notice if he takes ten minutes longer than usual to walk half a mile through a lane in which there are no perils? There is no reason to be anxious if he is twenty minutes later than usual—

probably the bus is late. But at twenty minutes of four, Janice Burke stood up in her garden and shielded her blue eyes with a grubby hand as she looked into the sun, since the boy would come out of the sun. And five minutes later she walked—to meet him, she told herself—along the garage drive and around the garage, where the field road ran down to Blueberry Lane. When she saw the field road empty, she began to hurry and then to call, "Rod, Rod?"

When she ran back from the empty lane, her breath came shudderingly. In the house she went to the telephone and drew deep, but still shuddering, breaths as she dialled, and tried to make her voice steady as she spoke. But her voice still shook. Rod had left on the bus with the others; they were sure of that at the school. And the bus had been on time, and Rod had got off at the usual place. Harry Bigham, who drove the school bus and had just returned to the garage from his last trip, was sure of that.

Janice Burke was reaching towards the telephone again, but it rang under her hand and she snatched at it. She said, "Yes?" in a voice not like her own.

"Mrs. Burke?" a man's voice said, and she said, "Yes. Oh, yes!"

"We've got the boy," the man said. It was a voice like any voice. "We'll tell you what to do tomorrow. You hear what I'm saying?"

"Yes," she said. "Yes! Rod is—"

"He'll be all right if you do what we tell you," the man said. "If you pay what we tell you." And then his voice faded, as he turned from the telephone. But she could hear him say, "Bring the kid here."

Then she heard Rod's voice—oh, his voice, *his* voice. "Mama?" Rod said. "Mama! They—"

She heard a click and the telephone was dead. She called into it—called the boy's name. Then she fainted. Franklin Burke, coming home early from the city, walked into the living room in time to see his wife sway in the chair and fall from it.

Janice came quickly back to an ugly world and clung to her husband, her body shaking—and told him.

It was not a decision which many have to make; it is a decision to be reached in agony. Nothing one does is better than any other thing, surer than any other. Franklin Burke called the State Police, to whom country people turn most readily. The police told him, when they came—not noisily and as much as possible by back roads—that he had done the right thing, and hoped they were telling him the truth.

They told him, too, that it looked like the work of professionals, and that the chances were better if that was so. Professionals wanted money; they wouldn't panic; wouldn't—they didn't finish that, or need to, and again they hoped that they were right.

"I'll pay anything," Franklin

Burke said, "anything I've got . . ."

"Only," the captain in charge of Troop K said at Hawthorne Barracks, "only, the kid's ten, isn't he? Old enough to remember faces. Remember places. He won't remember if he's dead."

"No," Captain Heimrich—Captain M. L. Heimrich, whose concern is with murder—said. "No, he won't remember if he's dead. He may be already."

They did not, of course, say that to the Burkes—to the tall, grey-haired man with face set hard, to the white-faced woman, whose eyes stared in terror and disbelief, and who would not let a doctor give her sedatives. "I've got to be here," she said, and said it over and over and over, "be here when he comes back." But the Burkes knew without being told . . .

The polish of professional crime showed in several ways. On that the various police agencies agreed—and by Saturday morning everybody was in on it. The police of the villages and cities of Westchester and Putnam counties were in on it, and the sheriffs of the counties, and the New York City police and the F.B.I. And, of course, the New York State police, with whom it began. They all agreed the crime was professional, and probably the work of city professionals, since professionals are, for the most part city men.

There was the deftness of the kidnapping itself. It was not by chance that a car had waited at

just the right time, just the right distance along the lane, for Rodney Burke. (The car had pulled to the soft shoulder of the narrow lane and left tyre tracks.) It was not by chance that the boy was the son, and the only son, of people with the money the Burkes had, or that their house, and the lane leading towards it, were isolated in the town of Van Brunt, near the Hudson.

It was not by chance that the letter which came in Saturday's mail was typed (new typewriter, almost without idiosyncrasies) on white paper one could buy anywhere, or that there were no fingerprints to guide, except those of postal clerks on the envelope. The letter had been mailed in midtown Manhattan. The letter read:

Price is \$100,000. Raise it by Monday and you will be told what to do. It will be tough for the boy if you get new bills, or big ones.

All planned, the police thought—shrewdly planned, with no amateurs involved. Ruthlessly planned. They'll kill him, Captain Heimrich thought, one man in thousands hunting a stolen child—hunting with nothing much to go on, and nothing much to hope for, and haunted by the memory of a woman whose eyes looked, and looked, and saw nothing. Probably dead already, Heimrich thought, on Sunday afternoon, as he followed a lead which would take him nowhere.

They had, after some thought, decided to let the newspapers have it. Professionals would know already that the police were in; the uttermost filaments of the web

they lived in would have quivered that news to the centre.

If enough people heard about it, somebody might see something, remember something. Many did, of course. Leads came from everywhere. Rodney Burke, age ten, fair hair, blue eyes, 84 pounds, was everywhere.

By Saturday afternoon he had been seen as far away as the West Coast. (The police doubted that. A car had been used, probably still was being used. But they checked everything, since anything was possible.)

The Virginia State Police closed in on a motel in Emporia because a boy was crying loudly in one of the rooms and sobbing out, "I want to go home." The boy was six. He was crying because he wanted to go home.

Heimrich, alone in an unmarked car—the police were spread thin to spread wide—drove down a long, rough driveway towards a house secluded in the woods. He drove down the drive because somebody had seen a car drive down it earlier, and somebody was quite sure the people who owned the house were in Europe. They were going on as little as that.

The house, when Heimrich came to it, was a rather large house—a house which had accumulated largeness over years. It was set in a green cup of lawn, with woods edging it. There was a car, with city licence plates, parked where the drive widened. Heimrich stopped close behind the city car and got out, and as he got out a man came to the door of the

house, and then on to the flagstones.

He was a young man in a polo shirt and slacks—a pleasant-looking young man, who smiled at Heimrich pleasantly. Heimrich told him about Rodney Burke and the smile vanished and the man swore. He said that kidnapping was the dirtiest business there was.

"Yes," Heimrich said. "This is your house, Mr.—?"

"Baxter," the man said. "No. Friends letting me use it. Only been here a couple of hours. Drove up from town and—" He stopped. His eyes narrowed. "Empty house," he said. "You think—?"

"Now, Mr. Baxter," Heimrich said. "We're looking everywhere, naturally. You've been through the house?"

"All this?" Baxter said, and motioned towards the sprawling house behind him. "Must be a dozen rooms. All we need is a couple of them." He paused. "Got friends coming up later," he said, and then, "You want to look? Come on."

He might as well, as long as he was there, Heimrich said. But it would be time wasted, as the morning had been time wasted, and now half the afternoon.

It was. They went together from room to room—looked into the attic and the basement, looked in bedrooms and kitchen and in three shining bathrooms. "Nice place," Baxter said, as they came into the living room, with the house searched and nothing found. "Lucky people. How about a drink?"

"No," Heimrich said. "I'll be getting on. Thanks for—" He stopped, as if listening. Baxter waited.

"Wish I could do more," Baxter said.

"Yes," Heimrich said, but not as if he were answering the pleasant young man in slacks and polo shirt. It was, instead, as if Baxter's voice had interrupted something, as if music were playing which Heimrich strained to hear.

"You hear water dripping anywhere?" Heimrich said. "Bathrooms? Kitchen?"

Baxter looked surprised, puzzled. Then he shook his head slowly, and listened, too. Listening carefully, he heard a faint sound which seemed to come from everywhere, and from nowhere—a kind of grating sound, rhythmical, with metallic pings marking the beat. The sound had just begun.

"I hear it now," Baxter said. "Just barely hear it. Something running in the house? Refrigerator, or—"

"Probably," Heimrich said. "Well, sorry to have bothered you, Mr. Baxter."

It might work that way. Heimrich went out onto the terrace, with Baxter in the living room, looking after him curiously. Heimrich looked around for what he wanted and found it. It was near the edge of the grass, a cube of cement blocks rising three feet above the lawn. It was capped by a heavy metal cover.

Heimrich started to walk toward it, and Baxter came out of the house and watched him. A pocket of Baxter's slacks bulged, heavily.

So it wasn't going to be that way.

Heimrich whirled as Baxter reached toward the heavy pocket, and Heimrich was the quicker. "Now, Mr. Baxter," Heimrich said, from behind a steady revolver, "we'll go have a look in the pump house. Good place to lock a small boy up in, wouldn't it be? Cover too heavy for a boy to lift and—*better drop it, Mr. Baxter.*"

The man who called himself Baxter dropped it. He wasn't pleasant-looking any more. He went ahead of Heimrich toward the concrete cube which housed the water pump.

"Get the cover off," Heimrich told Baxter, and Baxter got the cover off. It was heavy enough—far too heavy to be moved by a boy who, to push against it, would have to balance himself on iron rungs set close to the inner wall of the pump house.

The boy balanced himself on the rungs now and started to come out—and saw Baxter and started to go down again.

"All right, son," Heimrich said. "All right, Rod. You can come out, now."

It was like hide-and-go-seek, and the game over, and everybody home safe. Rodney Burke came out, blue eyes wide. He shrank away a little from Baxter, who did not move, and looked at Heimrich and said, "Are you a policeman, sir?"

"Yes," Heimrich said. "How did you start up the pump?"

"Anybody knows that," Rodney told him, and was evidently surprised that everybody did not. "There's a faucet. So they can

drain the tank to clean it. And when the water comes out, the pressure goes down and the pump starts and—"

"Of course," Heimrich said, gravely, and kept his revolver pointed at Baxter, who had never heard of this before.

"It's an old-style pump," Rod said. "Metal pipes. They use plastic now, mostly. Because with metal pipes the noise the pump makes telegrams—no, telegraphs through them and into the house and—"

"Yes," Heimrich said. "See it now, Mr. Baxter? Water pumps don't start up until enough water's been run out of the pressure tank. And—*there wasn't any water running in the house, was there?*"

"I saw a car come up," Rodney said. "Through the little window. The venti—ventilator? And I thought I'd just try. Maybe somebody'd hear. Because when I yelled nobody could—"

He stopped. "Gee," he said. "I left the water running. Pump the well dry."

Before Heimrich could do anything, Rodney seemed to bounce to the top of the pump house. He went down into it. He came back out of it. "All right now," Rodney Burke, country boy, trained to country ways, said, and the sun was bright on his bright hair.

Baxter, city man, used to city ways, looked at Rodney Burke. He began to shake his head slowly.

It had been a perfect set-up—a perfect place to keep a boy in until he decided what to do with him. How was a city man to know?

AUTHOR:

TITLE:

TYPE:

DETECTIVE:

LOCALE:

TIME:

COMMENTS:

MICHAEL GILBERT

Tea Shop Assassin

Detective Story

Superintendent Hazlerigg

London

The Present

Danger—menace—impending violence—all in a normally quiet little tea shop looking out over Westminster Bridge and the Houses of Parliament. One of Michael Gilbert's finest little tales . . .

EDITORS' FILE CARD

BEING crime reporter on a daily newspaper I know quite a lot about the ins and outs of London; and I've learned enough in the last ten years to know that it isn't in the obvious places—Soho or Notting Hill or Limehouse—that all the exciting things happen.

There's excitement everywhere—if you keep your eyes open and know the right people.

When I went into the tea shop—I expect you know the one I mean, it looks out over Westminster Bridge and the northern angle of the Houses of Parliament—I ran into former Inspector Hazlerigg. He caught my eye. I wasn't sure whether it had an invitation in it or not, but I naturally assumed that it had.

He's a Superintendent now, and as I knew, was standing in for Butt (who was recovering from influ-

enza) as temporary head of the Special Branch. I'd known Hazlerigg, off and on, for years; and I'd once been able to do him a small service—but that's another story.

As I walked to his table he stuck out his hand, then apparently changed his mind and sketched a sort of mixture between a wave and a salute.

"Pleased to see you, Superintendent," I said, affably.

"And I'm pleased to see you. No, take the other seat, if you don't mind."

I had been going to sit down in the empty chair on his right, which would have put me with my back to the rest of the room.

"I particularly want you to be in a position to see everybody," he said. "Don't stare round. Behave quite naturally. Coffee?"

The waitress came across and I ordered a cup.

When she had gone Hazlerigg spoke again.

"Do you remember Engels?" he said.

I had to pause before I answered that one.

"It's a long time ago," I said, slowly. "More than fifteen—no, nearer twenty years. I saw him in the Dock, at the Old Bailey. The charge was unlawful wounding. It had a political angle to it, I remember."

"That one had. He's a professional thug. He nearly killed one of Moseley's boys at a meeting."

"That's right. And I remember the Judge—it was old Arbutnot, wasn't it?"—saying 'I regard you as a very dangerous and very cold-blooded man. If you had made this assault for private gain I would have sent you to prison for a long time.'

"That's him," said Hazlerigg. "A political killer of the most dangerous type. And he's somewhere in this room."

"What?" I said. And then, more sensibly, "Why?"

"Don't you ever read your own paper?" said Hazlerigg, irritably. "In approximately ten minutes time"—he looked at his watch—"Ramon Charles gets off his train at Victoria Station. You know whose right-hand man and ambassador extraordinary Ramon Charles is. Well, his drive to the Palace will take him within a few yards of this tea shop. The anti-Fascist brigade have sworn to get him. And it would suit their book very well to get him in this country."

Outside it was a lovely day. The autumn sun was warming the grey stone of the Mother of Parliaments and glittering and winking from her hundreds of windows. As I looked, a uniformed policeman walked slowly across that little patch of green turf which carpets the foot of her walls. He reached the corner, paused a moment, turned, and came slowly back. Round the buttress I saw the helmet of another, and across the path a third.

Indeed the place was alive with them! When I really began to use my eyes I could see a dozen between the corner of Parliament Square and the Bridge.

My profession had led me into one or two dangerous places, but I was conscious now that my mouth was dry and I jumped when the waitress set my coffee down beside me with a clatter.

"The precise route from Victoria was a secret, of course," said Hazlerigg bitterly. "And, of course, it got out. I got a tip-off only this morning that Engels was going to operate, and that he was coming here to this tea shop—either to meet an accomplice, or simply to keep out of the way until the last moment—that bit's a trifle obscure. But I'm morally certain of one thing. He's in this room now."

Two parties of girls had left while he was talking. Only four tables remained occupied.

Hazlerigg pushed a newspaper at me.

"Pretend to be looking at this," he said. "Take your time. And keep your wits about you."

My coffee suddenly seemed to

have gone tasteless. However, I finished stirring it, carefully laid the spoon in the saucer, and picked up the newspaper. Then I shifted very slightly in my chair, and surveyed the room.

Immediately in front of me was a biggish man, with a healthy, open-air face, and a shock of white hair. A sporting parson in mufti, perhaps. He was lighting a clerical-looking pipe. As I watched, he got it going and one hand stole up for a moment to his collar and fiddled with the stud.

Behind him, near the serving hatch, was a man with a beard. It seemed quite a genuine beard.

He was no mere coffee drinker. He had ordered a plate of spaghetti on toast and was tossing it back with gusto into the pink cavern of his mouth. Occasionally he broke off to sling down a mouthful of tea. There was something almost bestial about the way he ate. As his jaw moved I noticed that the skin above, and to the side of, his beard was whiter than the rest of his face.

Beyond him, with his back to the wall, was a thinnish man with closely cropped hair. I couldn't see a great deal of him because he was holding his newspaper stretched out—almost deliberately, I thought—to hide the bottom part of his face. His eyes came up once, flickered in our direction, and went back again. His paper was folded back, and having very good eyesight I was amused to find that I could read, in the piece which hung down, part of a news article on the political significance of Senor Ramon Charles's visit.

The fourth man was sitting just inside the street door. There was nothing remarkable about him except his enormous Air-Force style of moustache. He had a cigarette which he held, quite motionless, in one hand; but with the fingers of his free hand he tweaked at his moustache in a plucking gesture which reminded me of something that, for the moment, I was unable to place.

"Don't glare at them," said Hazlerigg. "Take your time. The man we're dealing with's no fool. Relax and blow your nose or light a cigarette or something."

There was no change in Hazlerigg's voice but I could sense the tension in the air. Something was going to happen, and it was going to happen soon.

I felt for my cigarettes and Hazlerigg produced a lighter. As he did so my mind suddenly recovered something that my eyes had told me some time earlier.

"You light it," I said. "I want to look over your shoulder without appearing to do so. Thank you."

I took a second quick glance. It was at the thin man by the wall. Surely there was something wrong there . . . of course! If I could read the folded-back portion of his newspaper, it meant that the man himself must be reading it *upside down*.

Before I could speak an interruption occurred. A large cream coloured ambulance, its bell shrilling, shot past the entrance of the tea shop. By luck I kept my eyes not on it, but on the occupants of the room, and was therefore able

to note a curious fact. While the bearded man and the parson both looked up and followed the course of the ambulance with interest—indeed, the bearded man half rose in his seat—neither the thin man with the paper nor the one with the handlebar moustache looked, even for a single instant, in any other direction than into the room.

"Narrows the field," agreed Hazlerigg, calmly.

"You've spotted him?"

"I think so, yes."

"I think so, too," I said. "But I'm not sure."

"Then I'll give you a hint," said Hazlerigg. "The man's a professional killer. Concentrate on that. He uses a gun. And he spotted me almost as soon as I came in. Now do you know?"

The word "now", slightly emphasised, might have been a signal. Mr. Thin Man and Mr. Handlebar moustache both got to

their feet and came towards us.

Hazlerigg said to me, "Just think back. Everyone else in this room has been using both hands freely. Not you. I gave you three chances to take your right hand out of your pocket. First I offered to shake hands. Then, when you were using one hand to stir your coffee, I pushed the newspaper at you. No go. You finished stirring, laid down the spoon, and used the same hand for the paper. I offered you my lighter while one of your hands was busy taking out a cigarette. You excused yourself and made me light it for you. When a man's as careful as all that to keep his right hand hidden, Engels, it doesn't need much guessing to know what's in it. All the same, it's three to one, so I should leave the gun alone if I were you."

Mr. Thin Man and Mr. Handlebar were right behind me now. Superintendent Hazlerigg was right. It would have been stupid to have started anything.



WHAT HAPPENED AT THE FONDA

BRET HARTE

"WELL!" said the editor of the *Mountain Clarion*, looking up impatiently from his copy. "What's the matter now?"

The intruder in his sanctum was his foreman. He was also acting as pressman, as might be seen from his shirt-sleeves spattered with ink, rolled up over the arm that had just been working "the Archimedian lever that moves the world", which was the editor's favourite allusion to the hand-press that strict economy obliged the *Clarion* to use. His braces slipped from his shoulders during his work, were looped negligently on either side, their functions being replaced by one hand, which occasionally hitched up his trousers to a securer position. A pair of down-at-heel slippers—dear to the country printer—completed his negligé.

But the editor knew that the ink-spattered arm was sinewy and ready, that a stout and loyal heart beat under the soiled shirt, and that the slipshod slippers did not prevent its owner's foot from being "put down" very firmly on occasion. He accordingly met the shrewd, good-humoured blue eyes of his faithful henchman with an interrogating smile.

"I won't keep you long," said the foreman, glancing at the

editor's copy with his habitual half-humorous toleration of that work, it being his general conviction that news and advertisements were the only valuable features of a newspaper. "I only wanted to talk to you a minute about makin' suthin more o' this yer accident to Colonel Starbottle."

"Well, we've a full report of it in, haven't we?" said the editor wonderingly. "I have even made an editorial para. about the frequency of these accidents, and called attention to the danger of riding those half-broken Spanish mustangs."

"Yes, ye did that," said the foreman tolerantly; "but ye see, thar's some folks around here that allow it warn't no accident. There's a heap of them believe that no runaway hoss ever mauled the colonel ez *he* got mauled."

"But I heard it from the colonel's own lips," said the editor, "and *he* surely ought to know."

"He mout know and he moun't, and if he did know he wouldn't tell," said the foreman musingly, rubbing his chin with the cleaner side of his arm. "Ye didn't see him when he was picked up, did ye?"

"No," said the editor. "Only after the doctor had attended him. Why?"

"Jake Parmlee, ez picked him

outer the ditch, says that he was half choked, and his black silk neck-handkerchief was pulled tight around his throat. There was a mark on his nose ez ef some one had tried to gouge out his eye, and his left ear was chawed ez ef he'd bin down in a reg'lar rough-and-rumble clinch."

"He told me his horse bolted, buck-jumped, threw him, and he lost consciousness," said the editor positively. "He had no reason for lying, and a man like Starbottle, who carries a derringer and is a dead shot, would have left his mark on somebody if he'd been attacked."

"That's what the boys say is just the reason why he lied. He was took sudden, don't ye see—he'd no show—and don't like to confess it. See? A man like him ain't goin' to advertise that he kin be tackled and left senseless and no one else got hurt by it! His political influence would be ruined here!"

The editor was momentarily staggered at this large truth.

"Nonsense!" he said, with a laugh. "Who would attack Colonel Starbottle in that fashion? He might have been shot on sight by some political enemy with whom he had quarrelled—but not beaten."

"S'pose it warn't no political enemy?" said the foreman doggedly.

"Then who else could it be?" demanded the editor impatiently.

"That's jest for the Press to find out and expose," returned the foreman, with a significant glance

at the editor's desk. "I reckon that's whar the *Clarion* ought to come in."

"In a matter of this kind," said the editor promptly, "the paper has no business to interfere with a man's statement. The colonel has a perfect right to his own secret—if there is one, which I very much doubt. But," he added, in laughing recognition of the half reproachful, half-humorous discontent on the foreman's face, "what dreadful theory have you and the boys got about it—and what do you expect to expose?"

"Well," said the foreman very seriously, "it's jest this: You see, the colonel is mighty sweet on that Spanish woman Ramirez up on the hill yonder. It was her mustang he was ridin' when the row happened near her house."

"Well?" said the editor, with disconcerting placidity.

"Well," hesitated the foreman, "you see, they're a bad lot, those Mexicans, especially Ramirez, her husband."

The editor knew that the foreman was only echoing the provincial prejudice which he himself had always combated. Ramirez kept a *fonda*, or hostelry, on a small estate—the last of many leagues formerly owned by the Spanish grantee, his landlord—and had a wife of some small coquettish and redundant charms. Gambling took place at the *fonda*, and it was said the common prejudice against the Mexican did not, however, prevent the American from trying to win his money.

"Then you think Ramirez was jealous of the colonel? But in that

case he would have knifed him, Spanish fashion, and not without a struggle."

The foreman saw the incredulity expressed on the editor's face, and said somewhat aggressively, "Of course the boys know ye don't take no stock in what's said agin the Mexicans, and that's the reason why I thought I oughter tell ye, so that ye mightn't seem to be always favourin' 'em."

The editor's face darkened slightly, but he kept his temper and his good humour. "So that to prove that the *Clarion* is unbiased where the Mexicans are concerned, I ought to make it their only accuser, and cast doubt on the American's veracity?"

"I don't mean that," said the foreman, reddening. "Only I thought ye might—as ye understand these folks' ways—ye might make some copy outter the blamed thing. It would be a big boom for the *Clarion*."

"I've no doubt it would," said the editor dryly. "However, I'll make some inquiries; but you might as well let 'the boys' know that the *Clarion* will not publish the colonel's secret without his permission. Meanwhile," he continued, smiling, "if you are very anxious to add the functions of a reporter to your other duties and bring me any discoveries you may make, I'll—look over your copy."

He good-humouredly nodded and took up his pen again—a hint at which the embarrassed foreman, under cover of hitching up his trousers, awkwardly and reluctantly withdrew.

It was with some natural youth-

ful curiosity, but no lack of loyalty to Colonel Starbottle, that the editor that evening sought this "war-horse of the Democracy," as he was familiarly known, in his invalid chamber at the Palmetto Hotel. He found the hero with a bandaged ear and—perhaps it was fancy suggested by the story of the choking—cheeks more than usually suffused and apoplectic. Nevertheless, he was seated by the table with a mint julep before him, and he welcomed the editor by instantly ordering another.

The editor was glad to find him so much better.

"Gad, sir, no bones broken, but a good deal of 'possum scratching about the head for such a little throw like that. I must have slid a yard or two on my left ear before I brought up."

"You were unconscious from the fall, I believe."

"Only for an instant, sir—a single instant! I recovered myself with the assistance of a No'then gentleman—a Mr. Pamlee—who was passing."

"Then you think your injuries were entirely due to your fall?"

The colonel paused with the mint julep halfway to his lips, and set it down. "Sir!" he ejaculated, with astounded indignation.

"You say you were unconscious," returned the editor lightly, "and some of your friends think the injuries inconsistent with what you believe to be the cause. They are concerned lest you were unknowingly the victim of some foul play."

"Unknowingly! Sir! Do you take me for a chuckle-head, that I

don't know when I'm thrown from a buck-jumping mustang? Or do they think I'm a tenderfoot to be hustled and beaten by a gang of bullies? Do they know, sir, that the account I have given I am responsible for, sir?—personally responsible?"

There was no doubt that the colonel was perfectly serious, and that his indignation arose from no guilty consciousness of a secret. A man as peppery as the colonel would have been equally alert in defence.

"They feared that you might have been ill-used by some evilly disposed person during your unconsciousness," explained the editor diplomatically; "but as you say it was only for a moment, and that you were aware of everything that happened——"

"Perfectly, sir! Perfectly! As plain as I see this julep before me. I had just left the Ramirez rancho. The *señora*—a devilish pretty woman, sir—after a little playful badinage had offered to lend me her daughter's mustang if I could ride it home. You know what it is, Mr. Grey," he said gallantly. "I'm an older man than you, sir, but a challenge from a fascinating creature, I trust, sir, I am not yet old enough to decline. Gad, sir, I mounted the brute. I've ridden Morgan stock and Blue Grass thoroughbreds bareback, sir, but I've never thrown my leg over such a blanked Chinese cracker before. After he bolted I held my own fairly, but he buck-jumped before I could lock my spurs under him, and the second jump landed me!"

"How far from the Ramirez *fonda* were you when you were thrown?"

"A matter of four or five hundred yards, sir."

"Then your accident might have been seen from the *fonda*?"

"Scarcely, sir. For in that case, I may say, without vanity, that—er—the *señora* would have come to my assistance."

"But not her husband?"

The old-fashioned shirt frill which the colonel habitually wore swelled with indignation, possibly half assumed to conceal a certain conscious satisfaction beneath. "Mr. Grey," he said, with pained severity, "as a personal friend of mine, and a representative of the press—a power I respect—I overlook a disparaging reflection upon a lady, which I can only attribute to the levity of youth and to thoughtlessness. At the same time, sir," he added, with illogical sequence, "if Ramirez felt aggrieved at my attention he knew where I could be found, sir, and that it was not my habit to decline giving gentlemen—of any nationality—satisfaction, sir!—personal satisfaction."

He added, with a singular blending of anxiety and a certain natural dignity, "I trust, sir, that nothing of this will appear in your paper."

"It was to keep it out by learning the truth from you, my dear colonel," said the editor lightly, "that I called today. By the way, how do you account, Colonel, for your having been half strangled?"

The colonel brought his hand to his loose cravat with an uneasy

gesture and a somewhat disturbed face.

"I admit, sir," he said, with a forced smile, "that I experienced a certain sensation of choking, and I may have mentioned this to Mr. Parmlee; but it was due, I believe, sir, to my cravat, which I always wear loosely, as you perceive, becoming twisted in my fall."

He extended his fat white hand to the editor, who shook it cordially, and then withdrew. Nevertheless, although perfectly satisfied with his mission, and firmly resolved to prevent any further discussion on the subject, Mr. Grey's curiosity was not wholly appeased. What were the relations of the colonel with the Ramirez family? From what Starbottle himself had said, the theory of the foreman as to the motives of the attack might have been possible, and the assault itself committed while the colonel was unconscious.

Mr. Grey, however, kept this to himself. He briefly told his foreman that he found no reason to add to the account already in type, and dismissed the subject from his mind. The colonel left town the next day.

One morning, a week afterwards, the foreman entered the sanctum cautiously and, closing the door of the composing room behind him, stood for a moment before the editor with a singular combination of irresolution and discomfiture in his face.

Answering the editor's look of inquiry, he began slowly, "Mebbe ye remember when we was talkin' last week o' Colonel Starbottle's accident, I sorter allowed

that he knew all the time *why* he was attacked that way, only he wouldn't tell."

"Yes, I remember you were incredulous," said the editor, smiling.

"Well, I take it all back, I reckon he told all he knew. I was wrong!"

"Why?" asked the editor wonderingly.

"Well, I have been through the mill myself!"

He unbuttoned his shirt collar, pointed to his neck, which showed a slight abrasion and a small livid mark of strangulation at the throat, and added, with a grim smile, "And I've got about as much proof as I want."

The editor put down his pen and stared at him.

"You see, Mr. Grey, it was partly your fault. When you bedevilled me about gettin' that news, and allowed I might try my hand at reportin', I was fool enough to take up the challenge. So once or twice, when I was off duty, I hung around the Ramirez shanty. Once I went in thar when they were gamblin'; thar war one or two Americans thar that war winnin' as far as I could see, and was pretty full o' that *aguardiente* that they sell thar—that kills at forty rods. You see, I had a kind o' suspicion that ef thar was any foul play goin' on it might be worked on these fellers arter they were drunk and war goin' home with thar winnin's."

"So you gave up your theory of the colonel being attacked from jealousy?"

"Hol' on, I ain't through yet! I

only reckoned that ef thar was a gang of roughs kept thar on the premises they might be used for that purpose, and I only wanted to ketch 'em at thar work. So I jest meandered into the road when they war about comin' out and kept my eye skinned for what might happen. Thar was a kind o' corral about a hundred yards down the road, half adobe wall, and a stockade o' palin's on top of it about six feet high. Some of the palin's were off, and I peeped through, but thar warn't nobody thar. I stood thar, alongside the bank, leanin' my back agin one o' them openin's, and jest watched and waited.

"All of a sudden I felt myself grabbed by my coat collar behind, and my neck-handkercher and collar drawn tight around my throat till I couldn't breathe. The more I twisted round, the tighter the clinch seemed to get. I couldn't holler nor speak, but thar I stood with my mouth open, pinned back again that cursed stockade, and my arms and legs movin' up and down like one o' them dancin' jacks. It seemed funny, Mr. Grey—I reckon I looked like a darned fool—but I don't wanter feel ag'in as I did jest then. The clinch o' my throat got tighter; everything got black about me; I was jest goin' off and kalkilatin' it was about time for you to advertise for another foreman, when suthin broke!

"It was my collar button, and I dropped like a shot. It was a minute before I could get my breath ag'in, and when I did and managed to climb that darned stockade and drop on the other

side, thar warn't a soul to be seen. A few hosses that stampeded in my gettin' over the fence war all that was there. I was mighty shook up, you bet!—and to make the hull thing perfectly ridic'ous, when I got back to the road, after all I'd got through, darn my skin ef thar warn't that pesky lot o' drunken men staggerin' along, jinglin' the scads they had won and enjoyin' themselves, and nobody a-followin' 'em! I jined 'em jest for kempany's sake till we got back to town, but nothin' happened."

"But, my dear Richards," said the editor warmly, "this is no longer a matter of mere reporting, but of business for the police. You must see the deputy sheriff at once and bring your complaint—or shall I? It's no joking matter."

"Hol' on, Mr. Grey," replied Richards slowly. "I've told this to nobody but you—nor am I goin' to—*save*? It's an affair of my own, and I reckon I kin take care of it without goin' to the Revised Statutes of the State of California, or callin' out the sheriff's posse."

His humorous blue eyes just then had certain steely points in them like glittering facets, which the editor knew boded no good to an adversary.

"Don't be a fool, Richards," he said quietly. "Don't take as a personal affront what was a common, vulgar crime. You would undoubtedly have been robbed by that rascal had not the others come along."

Richards shook his head. "I might hev bin robbed a dozen times afore they came along—ef

that was the little game. No, Mr. Grey, it warn't no robbery."

"Had you been paying court to the *Señora* Ramirez, like Colonel Starbottle?" asked the editor, with a smile.

"Not much," returned Richards scornfully. "She ain't my style. But"—he hesitated, and then added, "thar was a mighty purty gal thar—her darter, I reckon—a reg'lar pink fairy! She kem in only a minute, and they sorter hustled her out ag'in—for darn my skin ef she didn't look as much out o' place in that smoky old garfisc-smellin' room as an angel at a bull fight. And what got me—she ez light-skinned ez you or me, blue eyes and a lot o' dark reddish hair in a long braid down her back. Why, only for her purty sing-song voice and her '*Gracias, señor*,' you'd hev reckoned she was a Blue Grass girl jest fresh from across the plains."

A little amused at his foreman's enthusiasm, Mr. Grey gave an ostentatious whistle and said, "Come, now, Richards, look here!"

"Only a mere child, Mr. Grey—not more'n fifteen if a day," responded Richards, embarrassed.

"Yes, but some of those people marry at twelve," said the editor with a laugh. "Look out! Your appreciation may have been noticed by some other admirer."

He half regretted this speech the next moment in the quick flush that brought back the glitter in Richards's eyes. "I reckon I kin take care of that, sir," he said slowly, "and I kalkilate that the next time I meet that chap—who-

ever he may be—he won't see so much of my back as he did."

The editor knew there was little doubt of this, and for an instant believed it his duty to put the matter in the hands of the police. Richards was too good a man to be risked in a barroom fight. But reflecting that this might precipitate the scandal he wished to avoid, he concluded to make some personal investigation. A stronger curiosity than he had felt before was possessing him. It was singular too, that Richards's description of the girl was that of a different type—the *hidalgo*, or fair-skinned Spanish settler. If this was true, what was she doing there—and what were her relations to the Ramirez family?

The next afternoon he went to the *fonda*. Situated on the outskirts of the town which had long outgrown it, it still bore traces of its former importance as a *hacienda*, or smaller farm, of one of the old Spanish landholders. The patio, or central courtyard, still existed as a stableyard for carts, and even one or two horses were tethered to the railings of the inner corridor, which now served as an open veranda to the *fonda* or inn. The opposite wing was utilised as a *tienda*, or general shop, and also belonged to Ramirez.

Ramirez himself—round-whiskered and Sancho Panza-like in build—welcomed the editor with fat, perfunctory urbanity. The *fonda* and all it contained was at his disposition.

The *señora* coquettishly bewailed, in rising and falling

inflections, his long absence, his infidelity, and general perfidiousness. Truly he was growing great in writing of the affairs of his nation—he could no longer see his humble friends! Yet not long ago—truly that very week—there was the head *impresor* of Don Pancho's *imprensa* himself who had been there!

A great man, of a certainty, but they must take what they could get. They were only poor innkeepers; when the governor came not they must welcome the *alcalde*.

To which the editor—otherwise Don Pancho—replied with equal effusion. He had indeed recommended the *fonda* to his *impresor*, who was but a courier before him. But what was this? The *impresor* had been ravished at the sight of a beautiful girl—a mere *muchacha*—yet of a beauty that deprived the senses—this angel—clearly the daughter of his friend? Here was the old miracle of the orange in full fruition and the lovely fragrant blossom all on the same tree—at the *fonda*. And this had been kept from him!

"Yes, it was but a thing of yesterday," said the *señora*, obviously pleased. "The *muchacha*—for she is but that—had just returned from the convent at San José, where she had been for four years. Ah! what would you? The *fonda* was no place for the child, who should know only the litany of the Virgin—and we have kept her there. And now that she is home again, she cares only for the horse. From morning to night! *Caballeros* must come and go, there might be a festival—all the

same to her, it makes nothing if she has the horse to ride! Even now she is with one in the fields. Would Don Pancho attend and see Cota and her horse?"

The editor smilingly assented. He accompanied his hostess along the corridor to a few steps which brought them to the level of the open meadows of the old farm inclosure. A slight figure on horseback was careering in the distance. At a signal from *Señora* Ramirez it wheeled and came down rapidly towards them. But when within a hundred yards the horse was suddenly pulled up, *vaquero* fashion, and the little figure leaped off and advanced toward them on foot, leading the horse.

Richards had not exaggerated the girl's charms. She was indeed dangerously pretty from her tawny little head to her small feet, and her figure, although comparatively diminutive, was perfectly proportioned. Grey-eyed and blonde as she was in colour, her Latin peculiarities were distinct, and only the good humoured and enthusiastic Richards could have likened her to an American girl.

But he was even more astonished noticing that her mustang was as distinct and peculiar as herself—a mongrel mare of the extraordinary type known as a "pinto," or "calico" horse, mottled in lavender and pink, Arabian in proportions, and half broken. Her greenish-grey eyes, in which too much of the white was visible, had, he fancied, a singular similarity of expression to Cota's own.

Utterly confounded, and staring at the girl in her white many-

flounced frock, bare head, and tawny braids, as she stood beside this incarnation of equine barbarism, Grey could remember nothing like it outside of a circus.

He stammered a few words of admiration of the mare. Miss Cota threw out her two arms with graceful gesture and a profound curtsy, and said, "A la disposicion de le Usted, señor."

Grey was quick to understand the malicious mischief which danced in the girl's eyes, and even fancied it was shared by the animal itself. But he was a singularly good rider of untrained stock, and rather proud of his prowess. He bowed.

"I accept that I may have the honour of laying the *señorita's* gift again at her little feet."

But here the burly Ramirez intervened. "Ah, Mother of God! May the devil fly away with all this nonsense! I will have no more of it," he said impatiently to the girl. "Have a care, Don Pancho, it is a trick!"

"One I think I know," said Grey. The girl looked at him curiously as he managed to edge between her and the mustang, under the pretence of stroking its glossy neck. "I shall keep my own spurs," he said to her in a lower voice, pointing to the sharp, small-rowelled American spurs he wore, instead of the large, blunt, five-pointed star of the Mexican pattern.

Without attempting to catch hold of the mustang's mane, Grey in a single leap threw himself across its back. The animal, utterly unprepared, was at first stupefied.

But by this time her rider had his seat. He felt her sensitive spine arch like a cat's beneath him as she sprang rocket-wise into the air.

But here she was mistaken. Instead of clinging tightly to her flanks with the inner side of his calves, after the *vaquero* fashion to which she was accustomed, Grey dropped his spurred heels into her sides and allowed his body to rise with her spring and the cruel spur to cut its track upward from her belly almost to her back.

She dropped like a shot, he dexterously withdrawing his spurs and regaining his seat, jarred but not discomfited. Again she essayed a leap; the spurs again marked its height in a scarifying track along her smooth barrel. She tried a third leap, but this time dropped halfway as she felt the steel scraping her side, and then stood still, trembling.

Grey leaped off.

There was a sound of applause from the innkeeper and his wife, assisted by a lounging *vaquero* in the corridor. Ashamed of his victory, Grey turned apologetically to Cota. To his surprise she glanced indifferently at the trickling sides of her favourite and only regarded him curiously.

"Ah," she said, drawing in her breath, "you are strong—and you comprehend!"

"It was only a trick for a trick, *señorita*," he replied, reddening. "Let me look after those scratches in the stable," he added, as she was turning away, leading the excited animal toward a shed in the rear.

He would have taken the *riata*

which she was still holding, but she motioned him to precede her. He did so by a few feet, but he had scarcely reached the stable door before she suddenly caught him roughly by the shoulders and, shoving him into the entrance, slammed the door upon him.

Amazed and a little indignant, he turned in time to hear a slight sound of scuffling outside, and to see Cota re-enter with a flushed face.

"Pardon, *señor*," she said quickly, "but I feared she might have kicked you. Rest tranquil, however, for the servant has taken her away."

She pointed to a slouching *peón* who was angrily driving the mustang toward the corral.

"Consider it no more. I was rude. Santa Maria! I almost threw you, too. But," she added, with a dazzling smile, "you must not punish me as you have her. For you are very strong—and you comprehend."

But Grey did not comprehend, and with a few hurried apologies he managed to escape his fair but uncanny tormentor. Besides, this unlooked-for incident had driven from his mind the more important object of his visit—the discovery of the assailants of Richards and Colonel Starbottle.

His inquiries of Ramirez produced no result. *Señor* Ramirez was not aware of any suspicious loiterers among the frequenters of the *fonda*, and except from some drunken American revellers he had been free of disturbance.

Ah! the *peón*—an old *vaquero*

—was not an angel, truly, but he was dangerous only to the bull and the wild horses—and he was afraid even of Cota! Mr. Grey was forced to ride home empty of information.

He was still more concerned a week later, on returning unexpectedly one afternoon to his sanctum, to hear a musical, childish voice in the composing room.

It was Cota. She was there, as Richards explained, on his invitation, to view the marvels and mysteries of printing at a time when they would not be likely to "disturb Mr. Grey at his work". But the beaming face of Richards and the simple tenderness of his blue eyes plainly revealed the sudden growth of an evidently sincere passion, and the unwonted splendor of his best clothes showed how carefully he had prepared for the occasion.

Grey was worried and perplexed, believing the girl a malicious flirt. Yet nothing could be more captivating than her simple and childish curiosity as she watched Richards swing the lever of the press, or stood by his side as he marshalled the type into files on his composing stick. He had even printed a card with her name—*Señorita Cota Ramirez*—the type of which had been set up, to the accompaniment of ripples of musical laughter, by her little brown fingers.

The editor might have become quite sentimental had he not noticed that the grey eyes which often rested on himself, even while she apparently listened to Richards, were more than ever like the eyes

of the mustang on whose scarred flanks her glance had wandered so coldly.

He withdrew presently so as not to interrupt his foreman's innocent *tête-à-tête*, but it was not very long after that Cota passed him on the highroad with the pinto horse in a gallop, and blew him an audacious kiss from the tips of her fingers.

For several days afterwards Richards's manner was tinged with a certain reserve on the subject of Cota which the editor attributed to the delicacy of a serious affection, but he was surprised also to find that his foreman's eagerness to discuss his unknown assailant had somewhat abated. Further discussion regarding it was naturally dropped, and the editor was beginning to lose his curiosity when it was suddenly awakened by a chance incident.

An intimate friend and old companion of his—one Enriquez Saltillo—had diverged from a mountain trip especially to call upon him. Enriquez was a scion of one of the oldest Spanish-Californian families, and in addition to his friendship for the editor it pleased him also to affect an intense admiration of American ways and habits, and even to combine the current Californian slang with his native precision of speech—and a certain ironical levity still more his own.

It seemed, therefore, quite natural to Mr. Grey to find Saltillo seated with his feet on the editorial desk, his hat cocked on the back of his head, reading the *Clarion* exchanges. But he was up

in a moment, and had embraced Grey with characteristic effusion.

"I find myself, my leetle brother, but an hour ago two leagues from this spot! I say to myself, '*Hola!* It is the home of Don Pancho—my friend! I shall find him composing the magnificent editorial leader, collecting the subscription of the big pumpkin and the great gooseberry, or goug-ing out the eye of the rival editor, at which I shall assist!' I hesitate no longer, I fly on the instant, and I am here."

Grey was delighted. Saltillo knew the Spanish population thoroughly—his own people and their Mexican and Indian allies. If anyone could solve the mystery of the Ramirez *fonda* and discover Richards's unknown assailant, it was he. But Grey contented himself at first with a few brief inquiries concerning the beautiful Cota and her anonymous association with the Ramirezes. Saltillo was as briefly communicative.

"Of your suspicions, my leetle brother, you are right—on the half! That leetle angel of a Cota is, without doubt, the daughter of the adorable *Señora* Ramirez, but not of the admirable *señor*, her husband. Ah! what would you? We are a simple, patriarchal race; thees Ramirez, he was the Mexican tenant of the old Spanish landlord—such as my father—and we are ever the fathers of the poor, and sometimes of their children. It is possible, therefore, that the exquisite Cota resemble the Spanish landlord. Ah! stop—remain tranquil! I remember," he went on, suddenly striking his

forehead with a dramatic gesture, "the old owner of thees ranch was my cousin Tiburcio. Of a consequence, my friend, thees angel is my second cousin! Behold! I shall call there on the instant. I shall embrace my long-lost relation. I shall introduce my best friend, Don Pancho, who lofe her. I shall say, 'Bless you, my children,' and it is feenish! I go! I am gone even now!"

He started up and clapped on his hat, but Grey caught him by the arm.

"For Heaven's sake, Enriquez, be serious for once," he said, forcing him back into the chair. "And don't speak so loud. The foreman in the other room is an enthusiastic admirer of the girl. In fact, it is on his account that I am making these inquiries."

"Ah, the gentleman of the *pantuflos*, whose trousers will not remain! I have seen him, friend. But remain tranquil. The friend of my friend is ever the same as my friend! He is truly not enticing to the eye, but without doubt he will arrive a governor or a senator in good time. I shall gif to him my second cousin. It is feenish! I will tell him now!"

He attempted to rise, but was held down vigorously by Grey.

"I've half a mind to let you do it, and get chucked through the window for your pains," said the editor, with a half laugh. "Listen to me. This is a more serious matter than you suppose."

And Grey briefly recounted the incident of the mysterious attacks on Starbottle and Richards. As he proceeded he noticed, however,

that the ironical light died out of Enriquez's eyes, and a singular thoughtfulness, unlike his usual precise gravity, came over his face. He twirled the ends of his pencilled moustache—an unflinching sign of Enriquez's emotion.

"The same accident that arrive to two men as opposite as the gallant Starbottle and the excellent Richards shall not prove that it come from Ramiercz, though they both were at the *fonda*," he said gravely. "The cause of it have not come today, nor yesterday, nor last week. The cause of it have arrive before there was any gallant Starbottle or excellent Richards; before there was any American in California—before you and I, my leetle brother, have lif! The cause happen first—two hundred years ago!"

The editor's start of incredulity was checked by the unmistakable sincerity of Enriquez's face. "It is so," he went on gravely. "It is an old story—it is a long story. I shall make him short—and new."

He stopped and lit a cigarette without changing his odd expression.

"It was when the *padres* first have the mission, and take the heathen and convert him—and save his soul. It was their business, you comprehend, my Pancho? The more heathen they convert, the more soul they save, the better business for their mission shop. But the heathen do not always wish to be convert; the heathen fly, the heathen skidaddle, the heathen will not remain, or will backslide. What will you do? So the holy fathers of those days

make a little game. You do not of a possibility comprehend how the holy fathers of those days make a convert, my leetle brother?" he added gravely.

"No," said the editor.

"I shall tell to you. They take from the *presidio* five or six dragoons—you comprehend—the cavalry soldiers, and they pursue the heathen from his little hunt. When they cannot surround him and he fly, they catch him with the lasso, like the wild hoss. The lasso catch him around the neck; he is obliged to remain. Sometime he is strangle. Sometime he is dead, but the soul is save! You believe not, Pancho? I see you wrinkle the brow, you flash the eye; you like it not? Believe me, I like it not, neither, but all life it was savage in my country in those days, and the manner of saving souls was of no moment compared with the savings."

He shrugged, threw away his half-smoked cigarette, and went on.

"One time a *padre* who have the zeal excessif for the saving of soul, when he find a heathen young girl have escape the soldiers, he of himself have seize the lasso and flung it! He is lucky; he catch her—but look you! She stop not—she still fly! She not only fly, but of a surety she drag the good *padre* with her! He cannot loose himself, for his *riata* is fast to the saddle; the dragoons cannot help, for he is drag so fast. On the instant she have gone—and so have the *padre*. For why? It is not a young girl he have lasso, but the devil! You comprehend—it is a punishment, a

retribution—he is feenish! And forever!

"For every year he must come back a spirit—on a spirit hoss—and swing the lasso, and make as if to catch the heathen. He is condemn ever to play his little game; now there is no heathen more to convert, he catch what he can. My grandfather have once seen him—it is night and a storm, and he pass by like a flash. My grandfather like it not—he is much dissatisfied. My uncle have seen him, too, but he make the sign of the cross, and the lasso have fall to the side, and my uncle have much gratification. A *vaguelo* of my father and a *peón* of my cousin have both been picked up, lassoed, and dragged dead.

"Many people have died of him in the strangling. Sometimes he is seen. Sometime it is the woman only that one sees, sometime it is but the hoss. But ever somebody is dead—strangled. Of a truth, my friend, the gallant Starbottle and the ambitious Richards have just escaped!"

The editor looked curiously at his friend. There was not the slightest suggestion of irony in his tone or manner; nothing, indeed, but a sincerity and anxiety usually rare with his temperament. It struck Grey also that Saltillo's speech had little of the odd Californian slang which was always a part of his imitative levity. He was puzzled.

"Do you mean to say that this superstition is well known?" he asked, after a pause.

"Among my people, yes."

"And do you believe in it?"

Enriquez was silent. Then he arose, and shrugged his shoulders. "*Quién sabe?* It is not more difficult to comprehend than your story."

He gravely put on his hat. With it he seemed to have put on his old levity. "Come, behold, it is a long time between drinks! Let us to the hotel and the barkeep, who shall give us the smash of brandy and the julep of mints before the lasso of Friar Pedro shall prevent us the swallow! Let us skiddadle!"

Mr. Grey returned to the *Clarion* office in a much more satisfied condition of mind. Whatever faith he held in Enriquez's sincerity, for the first time since the attack on Colonel Starbottle he believed he had found a really legitimate journalistic opportunity in the incident. The legend and its singular coincidence with the outrages would make capital copy.

No names would be mentioned, yet even if Colonel Starbottle recognised his own adventure he could not possibly object to this interpretation of it. The editor had found that few people objected to being the hero of a ghost story or the favoured witness of a spiritual manifestation. Nor could Richards find fault with this view of his own experience, hitherto kept a secret, so long as it did not refer to his relations with the fair Cota. Summoning Richards at once to his sanctum, Grey briefly repeated the story he had just heard and his purpose of using it. To his surprise, Richards' face assumed a seriousness and anxiety equal to Enriquez's own.

"It's a good story, Mr. Grey," he said awkwardly, "and I ain't sayin' it ain't mighty good newspaper stuff, but it won't do *now*. The whole mystery's up and the assailant found."

"Found! When? Why didn't you tell me before?" exclaimed Grey in astonishment.

"I didn't reckon ye were so keen on it," said Richards embarrassedly, "and—and—it wasn't my own secret altogether."

"Go on," said the editor impatiently.

"Well," said Richards slowly, "ye see there was a fool that was sweet on Cota, and he allowed himself to be bedevilled by her to ride her cursed pink and yaller mustang. Naturally the beast bolted at once, but he managed to hang on by the mane for half a mile or so, until it took to buck-jumpin'. The first buck threw him clean into the road. It didn't stun him, yet when he tried to rise, the first thing he knowed he was grabbed from behind and half choked by somebody. He was held so tight he couldn't turn, but he managed to get out his revolver and fire two shots under his arm. The grip held on for a minute, and then loosened, and the somethin' slumped down on top o' him, but he managed to work himself around. And then—what do you think he saw? *That thar hoss with two bullet holes in his neck, still grippin' his coat collar and neck-handkercher in his teeth!* Yes, sir! the rough that attacked Colonel Starbottle, the villain that took me from behind when I was leanin' agin that cursed fence, was

that same God-forsaken, hell-invented pinto hoss!"

In a flash of recollection the editor remembered his own experience, and the singular scuffle outside the stable door of the *fonda*. Undoubtedly Cota had saved him from a similar attack.

"But why not tell this story with the other?" said the editor, returning to his first idea. "It's tremendously interesting."

"It won't do," said Richards, with dogged resolution.

"Why?"

"Because, Mr. Grey—that fool was myself!"

"You! Again attacked!"

"Yes," said Richards, with a darkening face. "Again attacked, and by the same hoss—Cota's hoss! Whether Cota was or was not knowin' its tricks she was furious at me for killin' it—and it's all over 'twixt me and her."

"Nonsense," said the editor impulsively. "She will forgive you. You didn't know your assailant was a horse *when you fired*. Look at the attack on you in the road!"

Richards shook his head with dogged hopelessness. "It's no use, Mr. Grey. I oughter guessed it was a hoss then—*thar was nothin' else in that corral!* No, Cota's already gone away back to San José, and I reckon the Ramierezes got scared of her and packed her off. So, on account of its bein' *her* hoss, and what happened betwixt me and her, you see my mouth is shut."

"And the columns of the *Clarion* too," said the editor, with a sigh.

"I know it's hard, sir, but it's better so. I've reckoned mebbe she was a little crazy, and since you've told me that Spanish yarn, it mout be that she was sort o' playin' she was that priest and trained that mustang ez she did."

After a pause, something of his old self came back into his blue eyes as he sadly hitched up his braces and passed them over his broad shoulders. "Yes, sir, I was a fool, for we've lost the only bit of real sensation news that ever came in the way of the *Clarion*."



A New Story by

AUTHOR:

NEDRA TYRE

TITLE:

Carnival Day

TYPE:

Crime Story

LOCALE:

United States

TIME:

The Present

COMMENTS:

A beautifully written story, full of tenderness and sensitivity, and very, very real. What terrifying insights into the secret world of an eleven-year-old little girl!

BETTY wanted to lie in bed a little longer and look at the lowered shade that held out the sunlight except for a bright streak of it nosing through at the bottom. Then she could think about the nice things that might happen. Except that they might not.

Her mother was in the hall cleaning, doing the brisk morning work of Saturday. Betty listened to the rub of the mop, the whispering of the dust cloth. She pulled the teddy bear from his crumpled position on the floor and placed him on the pillow beside her. His hanging button of a left eye seemed to leer; his fur was worn and in spots was missing, as if he had mange. She took his right paw that was jerked towards his forehead in a kind of salute and rubbed it against her face so that he caressed her.

Outside the mop made its way down the hall—the only sound in

the house. Then the ringing of the telephone tore open the silence—first the ringing downstairs, then the echoing ring of the extension upstairs. Her mother would answer it, just outside Betty's door.

Betty knocked the teddy bear so that he made a somersault and landed face down on the floor. She knew the telephone call would be the sign she had been waiting for to tell her what kind of day it would be, and she was not quite ready to learn. She grabbed her pillow and burrowed beneath it, pressing the sides tight against her ears. The feathers, the ticking, the pillow case, nothing kept the noise out. She had heard the words before they were spoken, she had dreamed them all night.

Her father had said weeks ago—when the first signs were pasted on the billboards, the placards set up in the drug store windows, the shoe shop, the beauty parlours—that of course they must go to the

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carnival together. Hadn't they gone for years? But she couldn't really believe him because everything had been so different these last months. He understood her fear, her uncertainty, and weeks ago had given her five crisp dollar bills to hide away in her desk. The money was there for her to spend at the carnival, even if he didn't get to go with her.

Betty heard her mother's voice; if her mother had been at the North Pole her voice couldn't have been colder, and yet it was so nice, so distinct, every syllable of every word sounded.

"I tried to tell Betty not to count on you. She'll be hurt. But then you seem to take pleasure in hurting us."

It wasn't fair of her mother to talk to him like that; he'd left the money; he'd made his apologies, he'd said something might come up so that he couldn't take her; and now her mother talked to him as if he had broken a solemn promise.

Her mother didn't say goodbye but Betty heard the little latching click the telephone made as it slid back into place.

The autumn wind puffed the shade so that it slapped the sill. Betty reached down for the teddy bear and threw him across the room.

Outside there were the sounds of her mother putting away the mop in the utility cabinet, then a knock on the door.

"Good morning," her mother said, and filled the room with her briskness. "It's time you were up."

Betty kicked the sheet and made a wad of it at the foot of the bed.

"Your father telephoned to say he can't go to the carnival after all. I know how disappointed you are. But you can go with some of the other children on the street." She stooped over the teddy bear and picked him up, regimenting him so that his legs were straight and his arms were close to his sides. "It's silly the way you hang on to this old thing. You're nearly twelve—much too old for teddy bears. He ought to be thrown in the trash."

She was picking up clothes, straightening shoes—her mother was always, always picking up, straightening up now; she didn't use to be that way.

"Here's your robe. Go on downstairs and eat your breakfast. You'll find a glass of orange juice in the refrigerator. Take your milk from the bottle nearest the freezing unit. I'll be down in a minute to cook your egg."

"I don't want an egg," Betty said.

Betty tried to stamp as she walked down the stairs; she wanted to have the house filled with the jolting sounds of heavy footsteps and to have her mother tell her to stop, but the soft soles of her bedroom shoes sounded quieter than tiptoes.

She stood in the kitchen door looking at the neat rows of cabinets with everything stacked precisely in them, the white sink scrubbed spotless, the chairs lined up tight against the walls like shy children at a party. On the second shelf of the refrigerator she found the

glass of orange juice. She held it in both hands and rubbed her nose against the film outside until she made a wobbly circle; then she started to drink the juice—but it wouldn't go down; it held back because this was the day of the carnival and her father wasn't going with her.

Her mother was coming downstairs. Betty heard her precise heels strike the steps. She wanted to gulp the orange juice but the first taste of it made her sick. Betty looked at the full glass in her hands; she couldn't listen to a lecture, not today, on the way thousands of children in foreign countries would give anything for the delicious orange juice. There just might be time to get rid of it. She ran to the sink and poured the juice down the drain.

"You must drink some milk now," her mother said, as she entered the kitchen and saw the empty glass in Betty's hand.

"I don't want any milk," Betty said, waiting for the threat to come, waiting for her mother to say she couldn't leave the house until she had drunk some milk.

"I suppose it won't hurt you to go without it this once. Anyway, you'll eat enough junk at the carnival to fill you up. Run on upstairs and bathe."

Her mother said the words but she wasn't paying attention even to herself; her mother's mind seemed to be deep inside her, digging away at other thoughts.

In the bedroom Betty played the lovely forbidden game. If her mother downstairs buzzing with the vacuum cleaner on the dining-

room rug knew, she'd be mad. Betty brushed her teeth and punched the brush hard on the back of her tongue so that she gagged and the little bit of orange juice that she had swallowed came up. Next she stood in the middle of the floor holding a glass of water in her hand and spit water into the basin, spitting like old man Robinson who could stand in a store door and hit the middle of the street, making a cascade over the sidewalk. She filled the tub half full, then stuck only her toes in the water and rubbed herself hard with the towel as if she had taken a bath all over.

She dressed and was trying to sneak out of the house without last minute admonitions from her mother. But there was no need to try to sneak out. While Betty had dawdled over dressing, her father had left his office and come home. He and her mother were talking now, then shouting; the deadly barrage of their voices was wounding each other. Betty did not matter at such a time, not even on carnival day. She didn't belong to them when they were like that. She was alone. She wasn't even born.

She darted down the hall onto the porch and jumped across the front steps.

At the corner she heard a high scream and then a noise that she had never heard before, but she did not dare stop to listen to it.

Long before she got to the huge vacant lot across the railroad tracks, the sounds of the carnival came to her, the voices jabbering, pleading, cajoling, then the music all scrambled up so there was no

tune, like children yelling at each other, nothing making sense. And then she was there. It felt good to walk in the sawdust, to have it slow her down like walking in water, to have it creep inside her shoes. She made the rounds to see what she wanted to do; she might do everything; first, though, she must look things over, be cautious, the way you were careful about a new child or a new teacher or a new book before you accepted them.

Betty thought she had remembered it all, yet she hadn't; her memory had changed the carnival, but now it all came back, like a movie she was seeing for the second time—all the small booths with shelves, almost like the vegetable stalls at the Farmers' Market, but instead of vegetables they were strewn with dolls and animals and blankets and lamps and clocks.

The shooting gallery was just ahead. She stopped, remembering last year her father had stood right there, shooting as hard as he could, yet all the ducks marched past ignoring him and his shots until he had popped off a tail. This was the first place they had gone; she closed her eyes trying to make her memory bring it all back, trying to recall what her father had worn, what she had worn; but nothing came—nothing except the emptiness of her father's absence. A man picked up a rifle and squinted, then shot, and Betty walked past him.

Above all the invitations to step this way folks, try your skill for valuable prizes, she heard someone

say, "You, young lady with the pigtails, you look like someone who could win. Toss the ring on the numbered pegs and if they add up to an odd number you can pick out what you want." His smile slashed his face and he wagged his hand at her. Betty pulled the envelope her father had given her out of her skirt pocket. The five new dollars made crackling sounds as she fingered them to be sure she gave the man only one.

The man's fingers reached greedily for the dollar; they lingered in his change box. "Naturally you want more than one chance," he said. "One for a quarter or three for fifty cents."

"One," Betty said firmly.

She bumped hard against the counter as she made her first throw. The twine ring fell to the ground before it reached the target. The next one flew past the target and thumped against the thin wall of the booth; the third one looped a peg from which dangled a little placard with 16 painted on it.

"Too bad," the man said. "Sixteen is not a lucky number. But you made a good try. I'm sure you could win the next time."

"No, thank you," Betty said.

The man's smile dwindled; he erased her from his consciousness the way Miss Collins erased the arithmetic lesson in one swoop from the blackboard so that nothing was left, and was calling out, "You, young man in the corduroy jacket, come this way and try your luck at this interesting game of chance and skill."

"One, please," Betty said and tiptoed to shove her money through the mouse trap of an opening in a ticket booth before a tent splashed with signs reading *Thrill to the Death Defying Riders. Crashes. Spills.*

The roar of the motorcycles frightened her; she leaned down and watched them making rushing-spluttering circles; a man fell off, she screamed, wanting to grab her father, to dig her hands into his arms, the way she did when they had watched the riders in the years before. The helmeted men roared past, goggled men stooping, spread over the motorcycles like frogs.

Nothing was the same without her father; she had done all the things they did together. He wasn't there and it would serve him right if she saw things they hadn't seen together. He hadn't exactly steered her away from them; he had mentioned shows and rides he thought they might enjoy more. Now she walked up to the platform where the girls stood in their costumes, wearing robes, then one girl unloosened her robe and showed her costume. The men near Betty grinned; two whistled. The man on the platform winked and said, "Plenty more of the same on the inside."

Betty bought a ticket and sat down in a chair on the outer circle. The ground was uneven and her chair rocked back and forth. The lights went off; six girls came out on the stage and threw kisses at the audience; then a man came out and said something; hoots followed what the man said. Next to

Betty a man placed his hand on the knee of a woman sitting on his right and the man and woman smiled at each other. Hoots came again from the audience—hoots full of a special and secret knowledge, shutting out everyone who didn't understand and share the knowledge; Betty looked at the up-turned faces of the men sitting near her, their eyes catching strange lights from the stage; and all around, the sun sprinkled through holes in the tent and sifted through in bright dots to the ground. A woman sang a song while some girls in back of her danced, none of them doing the steps quite like any other or at the same time; then the curtain slapped to in gigantic relief that the show was over. The men around Betty got up and reached for cigarettes and they all walked out into the sunlight.

After that Betty went to the Jungle of Snakes; she looked over the canvas sides of an enclosure down to the waving bodies, the snakes writhing-twisting-squirming like all the nightmares of her life, and in the middle of their weaving a woman sat caressing them, letting them climb around her body, small ones making bracelets around her arms and anklets around her ankles; one large one twisted three times around her waist; heads darted back and forth, back and forth, their tongues licking like flames in and out of their flattened heads; then the woman picked up one from the canvas floor and held it to her, fondling it as if it were a baby, kissing it as if it were sweet. To escape her the snake

wiggled down, moving in the shape of an s, then lost himself among the other twists and whorls. Fear like fire swept over Betty and she rushed out of the tent.

She stood shivering and her teeth were clamped hard together as if she were playing in snow on the coldest morning in the year, though the midday sun felt like hot August heat on her shoulders. Twice she made the circuit of the booths and shows, trying to decide which one to see next. A sign beckoned to her, *Consult Dr. Vision the Visionary, the Mystic, the Clairvoyant. He Sees All. He Knows All. Come In and Discuss Your Problems.*

Her father didn't approve of fortunetellers; he said it was much nicer to wait and see what the future brought. But her father wasn't there. Betty stood half in and half out of the tent opening, the way she did in the dentist's reception room, waiting to push the buzzer to let the dentist's assistant know she had come. There was movement within the tent and a man said, "Do you wish to seek the advice of Dr. Vision?" He wore a green satin suit, with a gold sash, and his head held up the huge burden of a turban from which a limp feather drooped like a coxcomb. His moustache was drawn on in a thin black line and his eyebrows almost filled his forehead.

She nodded. It was still like being at the dentist's, not able to deny having an appointment.

"You are speaking to Dr. Vision," the man said, pointing to a chair. She sat at a table across

from him; his turbaned head seemed to sit on the crystal ball that separated them.

"The fee is one dollar," he said. Betty's hand rummaged in her pocket for money. Fifty cents bounced to the ground. Dr. Vision sat still with his hands pressed against his forehead and Betty fell to the ground hunting for the money, beating against a small rug that seemed to float on the grass and rubble beneath it. She found the money near Dr. Vision's feet and was surprised to see that he wore unlaced tennis shoes and no socks. She scrambled back to her chair and gave him an apologetic look, as if she had had to excuse herself from the table to be sick. He paid no attention and said in a voice that was a strange kind of whisper, "Do you have some special problem?"

She answered him in the same kind of whisper. "Yes, my mother—" And then she could go no further. What she was about to say had been betrayal, spreading the dark misery in her house before him, undressing her mother's hurt and her father's hurt before a stranger.

Dr. Vision looked into the crystal.

"I see," he said. "Your mother. Yes. She's been ill. She'll be all right. Don't worry about her. Is there anything else?"

Betty looked at her fingernails. There was one, just one that wasn't chewed; she had tried to leave at least one; one whole nail showed that she had some control; she held her hand tightly but the finger sprang to her mouth and

she started biting the nail.

"Maybe your schoolwork is bothering you. Is that it?"

School, Miss Smith saying, until this year you did good work. What's the matter now? It's not that you aren't capable. Don't you like your teachers? Are you getting lazy? What is it?

She couldn't answer Dr. Vision any more than she could answer Miss Smith; the words stopped in her throat.

He smiled, his moustache curling around in his smile like a cat's whiskers. "It's a little early but maybe you want advice about love."

"No," she shouted. Her voice startled them both, so that she dropped it back to the whisper they were using and said, "No, no."

"Then there's just one thing left. A career. You want advice about your career. Well, finish school first, then decide what you want to do. I predict a successful career for you."

Betty stood up and the chair fell behind her. She expected a banging, jolting noise but the grass caught the chair like a net and hushed the sound of its fall. She started to run.

"Just a minute," Dr. Vision said. "You are permitted to communicate with the Secret Powers of the Universe and ask a secret question or make a secret request. They will send you an answer, and only you will know their answer. Look closely into the crystal and repeat your request or your question to yourself three times." Betty walked towards the crystal and

bent over it. She made her request silently, as reverently as she said her prayers, her hands folded and her eyes closed: *Let everything be like it was, let everything be like it was, let everything be like it was.*

There was no noise—the whole carnival seemed quiet and still. Then Dr. Vision said words that she didn't understand and all the time he made huge gestures in the air. His hand moved under the table and his thumb reached around his little finger and he held a paper there. "This is your answer. The Powers have spoken," he said and made a bow as if he were waiting for applause. Betty snatched the paper from him and ran, grabbing at the slit in the tent, feeling herself almost smothered by the curtain as she rushed out. She couldn't look at the paper—she didn't dare look; she had the feeling she had had one Christmas when she had been sure that she wouldn't get anything, when she hadn't dared go to the Christmas tree in the living room. Only this wasn't quite like that; this was more—this wasn't being frightened over not getting presents, this was asking for what had to be. The small piece of paper was her destiny and she wadded it in the desperate knot of her fist.

Ahead of her was the largest cluster of people she'd seen all day. Above them on a platform a man took off his coat and swept his brow; as he raised his hand a huge circle of sweat showed underneath his arm on the yellow silk of his shirt. He had the voice of all the men standing on the platforms, a chant that came from the

back of his nose. "Ladies and gentlemen, you have seen many remarkable things today but you have seen nothing to equal the phenomenon we are presenting. The half man, half woman. This phenomenon can be legally married in any state of our great and beloved America to either a man or woman. You will hear a scientific lecture, absolutely clean, explaining this sexual phenomenon. I urge you to buy your ticket at once. For this performance only the cost is thirty-five cents, the usual price of admission is seventy-five cents, you will be paying less than half the usual charge. Only adults allowed. No one under sixteen admitted."

People moved against Betty, crushing her, pushing her towards the tall box where a man sold tickets. She tried to move away from them, but the man kept looking down at her and saying thirty-five cents please, thirty-five cents, and the ones behind her were saying go on, what's holding us up, and she was trying to tell the man she was only eleven.

The crowd pushed Betty, shoved her, thrust her closer to the man. She felt that she was being suffocated.

"No," she cried out. "No, I don't want to see." She threw back the rocks of their bodies and squirmed through.

She sobbed and plunged through the sawdust, her feet kicked up little storms of it; then her sorrow told her what she was searching for, longing for, what she loved most of all about the carnival. The merry-go-round. That was all she

wanted now. She ran towards it and its piping tune embraced her and she saw the stiff ponies with their arched tails and prancing legs making their rounds far away. She dashed towards the merry-go-round, remembering how her father used to let her ride it for hours; how he rode a pony alongside her, and his long legs dangled, striking the floor when his pony descended; how sometimes he doubled up his legs in the stirrup so that he looked like a jockey; how sometimes they got off their ponies and sat together in a chariot. Her father would get tired at last and stand outside the merry-go-round's circle waving to her as she rode by; their waving lasted so long that one wave was not over before she was back again, passing him, waving to him again.

She reached for money to buy tickets and the paper with her destiny on it dropped to the ground. She did not even notice.

"Five," she shouted above the magic piping. "I want five tickets for the merry-go-round."

She folded the tickets and waited on the outside for the merry-go-round to slow down. Some boys leaped off before it stopped, and the younger children squatted down to jump flatfooted to the ground.

Betty found a red pony and climbed on it.

The music started, the merry-go-round began to revolve, while all the booths and shows were lined up outside, not able to touch the enchanted circle of the merry-go-round; voices were saying what they had been saying all day, but

now the music blotted them out so that Betty had to strain to hear—hot dogs ten cents, hamburgers made of the finest beef twenty cents, souvenirs you'll value the rest of your life, canary birds two dollars, pennants of your favourite college fifty cents, see the half man, half woman, take a chance at this interesting game of skill . . . hurry, hurry, hurry.

And then she did not hear them at all; she would not let her ears hear and she closed her eyes; she was holding on to her pony and listening only to the music, safe from everything, safe from her mother's eternal cleaning and the sad things that went on at home, the harsh voices and the harsher silences.

The merry-go-round slowed and Betty opened her eyes.

He was there.

Her father was just outside the circle of parents waiting for their children. And Betty's day was saved. She should have known her father would not disappoint her.

He waved at her and she saw that he was not alone. It was funny. She knew the man he was

with. It was Mr. Williams the policeman—everybody in town knew Mr. Williams. They must have met each other accidentally at the carnival. Maybe Mr. Williams was waiting for someone he knew to get off the merry-go-round. Her father seemed to be pleading with him, as if he were asking permission, and Mr. Williams nodded.

The music was beginning again, the merry-go-round started its slow turning, the children scrambled on and her father leaped on and came towards her. His arms grabbed for her and his mouth seemed to have words that could not be spoken. Then the man taking the tickets came round and Betty handed him two, one for herself and one for father. The merry-go-round was going faster and her pony started to rise; the lifting took her from her father's embrace, but his hand reached wildly for her hand and their grip was as strong as their love. The carnival around them was not yet the blur it would be when they went at full speed and Betty could still see Mr. Williams watching them, watching most of all her father, and the policeman's face was very sad.



EDITORS' FILE CARD

| | |
|------------|---|
| AUTHOR: | BEN HECHT |
| TITLE: | <i>Chicago Nights' Entertainments</i> |
| TYPE: | Detective Stories |
| DETECTIVE: | Sergeant Kuzick |
| LOCALE: | Chicago |
| TIME: | A generation ago |
| COMMENTS: | <i>Henry Justin Smith called a THOUSAND AND ONE AFTERNOONS IN CHICAGO, from which these sketches were taken, "the first full release of Hecht's literary powers".</i> |

"OFFHAND," said Sergeant Kuzick of the first precinct, "offhand, I can't think of any stories for you. If you give me a little time, maybe I could think of one or two. What you want, I suppose, is some story as I know about from personal experience. Like the time, for instance, that the half-breed Indian busted out of the bridewell, where he was serving a six months' sentence, and snuck home and killed his wife and went back again to the bridewell, and they didn't find out who killed her until he got drunk a year later and told a bartender about it. That's the kind you want, ain't it?"

I said it was.

"Well," said Sergeant Kuzick, "I can't think of any offhand, like I said. There was a building over on West Monroe Street once

where we found three bodies in the basement. They was all dead, but that wouldn't make a story hardly, because nobody ever found out who killed them. Let me think a while."

Sergeant Kuzick thought.

Then he inquired doubtfully. "Do you remember the Leggett mystery? I guess that was before your time. I was only a patrolman then. Old Leggett had a tobacco jar made out of a human skull, and that's how they found out he killed his wife. It was her skull. It came out one evening when he brought his bride home. You know, he got married again after killin' the first one. And they was having a party and the new bride said she didn't want that skull around in her house. Old Leggett got mad and said he wouldn't part with that skull for love or money. So when

he was to work one day she threw the skull into the ash can, and when old Leggett came home and saw the skull missing he swore like the devil and come down to the station to swear out a warrant for his wife's arrest, chargin' her with disorderly conduct. He carried on so that one of the boys got suspicious and went out to the house with him and they found the skull in the ash can, and old Leggett began to weep over it. So one of the boys asked him, naturally, whose skull it was. He said it wasn't a skull no more, but a tobacco jar. And they asked him where he'd got it. And he begun to lie so hard that they tripped him up and finally he said it was his first wife's skull, and he was hung shortly afterwards. You see, if you give me time I could remember something like that for a story.

"Offhand, though," sighed Sergeant Kuzick, "it's difficult. I ain't got it clear in my head what you want either. Of course, I know it's got to be interestin' or the paper won't print it. But interestin' things is pretty hard to run into. I remember one night out to the old morgue. This was 'way back when I started on the force thirty years ago and more. And they was having trouble at the morgue owing to the stiffs vanishing and being mutilated. They thought maybe it was students carryin' them off to practise medicine on. But it wasn't, because they found old Pete—that was the coloured janitor they had out there—he wasn't an African, but it turned out a Fiji Islander afterwards.

They found him dead in the morgue one day and it turned out he was a cannibal. Or, anyway, his folks had been cannibals in Fiji, and the old habit had come up in him so he couldn't help himself, and he was makin' a diet off the bodies in the morgue. But he struck one that was embalmed, and the poison in the body killed him. The papers didn't carry much of it on account of it not bein' very important, but I always thought it was kind of interestin' at that. That's about what you want, I suppose—some story or others like that. Well, let's see . . .

"It's hard," sighed Sergeant Kuzick, after a pause, "to put your finger on a yarn offhand. I remember a lot of things now, come to think of it, like the case I was on where a fella named Zianow killed his wife by pouring little pieces of hot lead into her ear, and he would have escaped, but he sold the body to the old county hospital for practicin' purposes, and while they was monkeying with her skull they heard something rattle and when they investigated it was several pieces of lead inside rattling around. So they arrested Zianow and got him to confess the whole thing, and he was sent up for life, because it turned out his wife had stabbed him four times the week before he poured the lead into her while she slept, and frightened him so that he did it in self-defence, in a way.

"I understand in a general way what you want," murmured Sergeant Kuzick, "but so help me if I can think of a thing that you

might call interestin'. Most of the things we have to deal with is chiefly murders and suicides and highway robberies, like the time old Alderman McGuire, who is dead now, was held up by two bandits while going home from a night session of the council, and he hypnotised one bandit. Yes, sir, you may wonder at that, but you didn't know McGuire. He was a wonderful hypnotist, and he hypnotised the bandit, and just as the other one, who wasn't hypnotised, was searching his pockets McGuire said to the hypnotised bandit, 'You're a policeman, shoot this highwayman'. And the hypnotised one was the bandit who had the gun, and he turned around, as Alderman McGuire said, and shot the other, un hypnotised bandit and killed him. But when he reported the entire incident to the station—

I was on duty that night—the captain wouldn't believe it, and tried to argue McGuire into saying it was an accident, and that the gun had gone off accidentally and killed the un hypnotised bandit. But the alderman stuck to his story, and it was true, because the hypnotised bandit told me privately all about it when I took him down to Joliet.

"I will try," said Sergeant Kuzick, "to think of something for you in about a week. I begin to get a pretty definite idea what you want, and I'll talk it over with old Jim, who used to travel beat with me. He's a great one for stories, old Jim is. A man can hardly think of them offhand like."

And the old sergeant sank into his wooden chair and gazed out of the dusty station window with a perplexed and baffled eye.



AUTHOR: **AVRAM DAVIDSON**

TITLE: ***The Creator of Preludes***

TYPE: Suspense Story

LOCALE: United States

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *Cummings was a sensitive modern artist. He had devoted his entire painting career to a series of Preludes—number 61 was now on the easel. The only flies in his contentment were his wife's unendurable parents.*

GEORGE CUMMINGS was padding lightly around in his slippers, viewing first from one angle and then from another a new thing in caseins he was working on, when he heard a slight noise from somewhere underneath his studio window. The studio was on the third floor of the house—indeed, it was the entire third floor—and usually he never heard slight noises when he was working. He had been absorbed for hours; the medium was not a new one for him, but the means were: he was using feathers. He had paused, then, for a minute, and he imagined he could hear the words with which Art Clathum would greet the new canvas. "There's a wonderful quality here, G.," he'd say. "A certain eagerness, not precisely tremulous, but certainly delicate." Something like that. Pity

people still listened to men like Berenson, and looked to the dead, dead, past, when critics of Clathum's stature (and painters of Cummings') were ignored by all but a few.

Someone was walking around below.

He started to go to the window, paused, then looked again, lovingly, at the canvas. What else would Art say? "I notice, too, the gradual change in tonal values. The hesitancy is giving way to a firm awareness. I might even say, to a vigorous, almost brutal, direct approach. And the colours, too . . . less pink, less grey. Those reds and purples, G.—" He'd say this because it was in the painter's own mind. And his mind and Art Clathum's were so very close.

Cummings approached the window cautiously and peered out. He

drew back at once, swearing silently. It was Lina's parents—the Weird Twins. What the hell brought them here?

How characteristic, too, was their approach! No straightforward ring at the front door. Prowling around, peeking in windows, cautiously testing and tugging at the side and back doors. There might perhaps be in-laws who were tolerable, but as a general rule—and without question in his own particular case—how much better it would be if in-laws committed suttee or drank a cup of hemlock as soon as their children married.

Perhaps if he remained very still they would go away. Fortunately he was wearing slippers. But he knew it was a vain hope. Even if the place were boarded shut it wouldn't keep them out. They'd go to the real estate office in the village which managed the property and tell some cunning lie of the sort which only their peasant shrewdness could conceive—Lina had given them the keys and asked them to come down, only the keys were mislaid—and so they'd cozen other keys from the agent, who only knew the trickery of business and would be no match for them. . . . Better change the locks, he told himself, and glanced at the clock. Ten. They must have got up at dawn. And where had they parked the car? How like them not to have driven up to the house and thus have given him some warning! Well, it would be interesting to see how long they'd hover around, how long they could hold out.

Down below a sibilant whispering began. After a while they would raise their voices. Cummings sighed, shook his head. The same old gambits. They were, of course, waiting for Lina to appear, so they could go through their traditional series of little cries and noises: surprise, anticipation of welcome, delight. Scanning her face for the sight of her emotions, looking at each other, then taking a double pleasure in their daughter's responses. He clenched his fists. Why couldn't they act like anyone else? Call or write that they were coming, drive up to the front door, ring the bell . . . Lina, at first, had taken their irritating ways for granted. After all, she grew up with them. But, by and by, she'd come to realise how odd, how gauche, how impossible it all was, and then she began to excuse it—realising how utterly beyond excuse it all was. But the process was slow, terribly slow.

Mrs. Grasko cleared her throat. Mr. Grasko coughed. Cummings hoped they would both choke. If he could have persuaded Lina, they'd have moved farther away at the very beginning. But this was all the distance he could manage. It reduced the number of visits, but even one a month was one too many.

"Ten o'clock," Mr. Grasko said. "Maybe she's sleeping late?" She—no reference to him. It was always that way.

"Of course she's up," the old lady said. Then the nervous laugh, no pretence to mirth, but still demanding from you at least a smile in confirmation.

Cummings waited, visualising their taut expressions, their exchange of frowns. Then the old man said, "We can sit on the front porch. We won't disturb." As if they hadn't already crept on noiseless feet to test the porch door. Finally, Cummings felt he'd had enough. He picked up the heavy unabridged dictionary and let it fall. Above the noise o. the thud he heard with pleasure the old woman's startled squeal, the old man's frightened grunt. Then, silently on his slipped feet, he made his way downstairs, out the front door, and came upon the Graskos from behind.

As usual, the sight of them made his gorge rise. It wasn't merely that they were ugly and ignorant. It was that they obviously never realised it. Which made them impossibly ugly, unendurably ignorant. Art Clathum had said to him (and that was another thing, they'd never tactfully vanish when his friends appeared, but would stay on, peering, listening, exchanging glances, and actually speaking, thus making their stupidity manifest, their coarseness palpable), "How did such a pair of trolls ever produce a pretty girl like Lina?—a naiad, a peri?"

How indeed? "The old woman," Art had said, "looks like an unfrocked stevedore. The old man, I'm sure, has nails in his feet and sleeps standing up." And Mrs. Grasko had, unwittingly, confirmed Art's judgment, even before it was uttered. When first faced with Lina's intention to marry Cummings, Mrs. Grasko had felt it necessary to recapitulate

her husband's and her own hard struggles in America—as if it had any bearing on the facts. The Mister, she lamented, had worked like a horse—like a horse—and she had worked just as hard—just as hard. Well, it figured. He'd lived like a horse, instead of like a human being, and so he came to look like a horse and to think like a horse.

And what can a team of horses expect to know about modern art? If Cummings had been a house painter—or even, as they put it, "a picture painter".

Finally brought, unwillingly (it was Lina's wish, not his!), to Cummings' tiny studio, and face to face with his canvases, they had merely gaped. "This is called *Prelude 27*," the artist said, smiling faintly, gesturing to the easel. "The leading art critic of our time, Arthur Clathum, of whom I'm sure you've heard, refers to the *Preludes* as 'polychromatic compositions reflecting the barely perceptible undertones of the static city-state—phenomena of pure meditation'."

Knowing nothing of form or execution, the Grasko pair (he was already beginning to think of them as The Weird Twins) naturally asked about the only aspect of art they could be expected to grasp. "How much do you get for one?"

"They are priced at \$350 each," Cummings had said—and added, knowing how Clathum and his other friends would hold their sides when they heard, "but for you I'll take off 15 per cent., and if you buy five I'll take off 20 per cent. For a dozen——"

How hastily the old woman, the

she-troll, her heavy underslung jaw working frantically, had said, "We have no room, we have no room!" And threw an agonised look at her mate, lest he be trapped into buying.

At once the old man put his long face into motion, shook his head. Then he asked, "You sell many of them? Huh? How many you sell?"

Lina had then interposed. "Everyone agrees that George is one of the most——"

"But how many he sells?" insisted the old horse.

"The 7th and 13th *Preludes* have been acquired by the L. C. Griffith Collection of Contemporary Art," said Cummings. And, naturally, they couldn't let it rest at that, but must worry it, like a dog with a bone. He sold only two? He only sold two? Then the sluices were opened. How long has he been painting? He has no other job? How does he live? And then the flood crested: How will you live? How can he support you?

Cummings, bored, had gone over to a corner to clean his brushes. He was still using brushes at that time.

Lina proudly—and yet a bit fearfully—said her piece. The trolls were looking at her, mouths open, heads cocked to one side, sure that their simple mathematics had convinced her. When they heard her say, "Everything I have I want to share with him," the old man had gaped, not grasping what she meant. But the ugly old woman understood at once. She let out a wail.

"Uncle's money! She means Uncle's money!"

And the old man: "No. No, baby. No, no, no."

"Uncle" (Cummings never tried to pronounce his real name) was actually a cousin who had lived with them for thirty years. After thirty years of equine toil, he had overcome his peasant fear of lawyers and had actually made a will leaving his sweat-stained estate (insurance included) to Lina as a present for her twenty-first birthday. And then died. Cummings rather liked Uncle. There is nothing more considerate than a well-timed death.

He then put down the brushes and took Lina in his arms. The old trolls each took a step forward, then stopped, their arms stretched out. "I hope you'll come to our wedding," Cummings said, politely.

"I'll die!" keened the old woman. "Lina, I'll die!"

But she didn't—damn her—she didn't. And so he and Lina were married quietly and came to tell the Graskos. Her father had reared up from his kitchen chair and waved his huge calloused hands. "I should tear your head off!" he bellowed, while his wife sobbed into her apron. "I should kill you!" It was all very tiresome. And when, finally, they had subsided, the news that the young couple were buying a house farther upstate set them off again.

"So far? So far away? Why, baby? No—don't."

"George needs a quiet place to work in, Papa."

"Nearer, there are quiet places.

"Don't move far away, baby. We have only you."

Cummings tightened his arm around Lina. She said, with only a slight trembling of body and voice, "I'm not your baby any more, Mama. My life is with my husband from now on. But you'll come and see us."

And, sure enough, they had. And had made scenes (though no longer in front of *him*) when he and Lina had, as was natural enough, taken out insurance on each other's life and made mutually beneficial wills. He could still hear their half-whispered voices: "But what does *he* have to leave you? Huh? His paintings? Nothing worth. Nobody buys." And when Lina, worn down by persistent questions, finally announced that no children were planned for the near future: "He wants you only for himself"—which was true enough, why not? And the she-troll sent her mate out to stare blankly at the patio while she whispered a peasant trick to deceive Cummings . . .

It was becoming unbearable. Whenever it did seem as if Lina was coming to the point where she would put a stop to it all by herself, something would happen—a squabble between the two of them, perhaps—and she'd backslide. It was unendurable. He couldn't stay shackled that way forever. It was inevitable that something . . .

Cummings walked up silently behind the Graskos and stopped about five feet away. He must have stood there for a full minute, watching them squint up at the house, before the old woman

noticed him. She gave a squeak of fright and clutched her husband. They swung around, awkwardly, to face him. Cummings said nothing.

Finally Mrs. Grasko gave her empty chuckle, scanned his face, and, seeing nothing, spoke at last. "Lina is sleeping?"

Cummings said, "No."

The old couple glanced nervously at one another. Cummings said, "Is the mail no longer being delivered? Are all the telephone lines down?"

"Huh?" from Mr. Grasko.

"Lina went to the village?" from Mrs. Grasko.

His anger and his desire for them to be gone rose in Cummings' throat. "I have, heaven knows, expressed to you often that you notify us before you come. It is inconceivable to me that you have never once done so. Consequently you find me alone, and quite unable to entertain you."

They merely stared at him. Then—"Alone?" repeated the old man.

And—"Lina's not here?" asked the old woman.

Cummings remained silent.

"Where is she?" they both asked, after a few seconds.

"Gone to visit a friend. I can't ask you in because I've nothing prepared for visitors, and besides I'm very busy. Had you notified us—"

But it was all wasted. Where was Lina? She had gone to visit a friend. What friend? One whose name would mean nothing to them. When did she go? Yesterday. The friend lived in the vil-

lage? No. Where did the friend live? It was of no importance to them where she lived. Oh, the friend was a lady friend? What was the lady friend's name and where did she live?

All this with pauses and side glances and whispers in their native language. Finally Cummings looked at his watch. Old Mrs. Grasko said, "We'll bring up the car and we'll wait for her. We won't bother you. We'll just wait for her in the car. We have food."

At this Cummings lost his temper. He swore aloud and cried out at them, "No, you won't bring up your damned car and wait for her! She may not be back for days! I don't want you hanging around! Just get out of here and don't come back till you're asked!"

They backed away from him. The old woman looked at the house. "Lina," she called. "Lina? Baby? It's me . . . Mama is here!" And they walked around the house calling out to Lina. After a while they went away, walking slowly, constantly looking back.

Cummings went inside, locking the door. He started to go back to his studio, but found that he was trembling, and sat down, instead. He looked around him. It was a beautifully furnished little house. Uncle's insurance had paid for it—just as the rent from the houses Uncle's estate consisted of, maintained it.

It wasn't eleven yet, but Cummings poured himself a drink and gulped it down. Then he went upstairs. He looked at *Prelude 61* on the easel, but at the moment

he didn't feel like casein or feathers. There was another canvas prepared, so he put it in place of the half-done work, took out oils and brushes and palette knives. Quickly he began to work, laying on heavy blobs and smearing with violent strokes, scraping the colours—the reds and purples very dark—and then greens and angry yellows and dead black . . .

The bell began to ring, and as it penetrated his mind there came with it the sound of an automobile, which had preceded the bell. Reluctantly he set down the palette, the brush, the knives, and clumped downstairs.

"Hello, Mr. Cummings," said the man at the door. "I'm sorry to bother you, but, um—" Looking past him, Cummings saw The Weird Twins standing at the bottom of the steps, their gaze craning upwards. The man spoke again. "Uh, maybe you remember me—"

Remember him? Of course. The time some high school kid, celebrating a basketball win, had broken into the house with two friends and taken a case of beer—the deputy sheriff's name was Pelton.

"Edgar Pelton, isn't it?"

The man smiled. He seemed relieved, but not for long. A friendly type, all red hair and freckles and (faced with the panorama of *Preludes* on the walls of the Cummings' house) awed ignorance. He shifted now, then half glanced at the troll-couple standing implacably behind him.

"What can I do for you, Sheriff?"

Pelton grimaced. "Well, it's, uh, not for *me*. I mean—these folks say that they're your in-laws—and you chased 'em off the property—and you wouldn't let 'em see your wife."

Cummings said that it hardly seemed a matter for the sheriff's office, even if true—and it was not true. He'd asked them to leave, yes, because they'd worn out their welcome and he was busy. As for refusing to let them see his wife, she wasn't here to be seen.

"Gone off to visit a friend, I understand?" Cummings said that was so. "Well, it's just a minor question, really, but it seems it'll put their minds at ease—your in-laws, mean to say—if you could just say *what* friend?"

The Graskos had come up the stairs and were now standing behind the deputy. Cummings gave them barely a look as they glowered. "I'm afraid I can't, Pelton. She asked me not to."

The old woman burst out, "I don't believe! I don't believe!"

And the he-troll said, thickly, "He tells you lies!"

Before anything else could be said, the old woman gave a gasp and, her face fixed in a grimace, she ran up the steps and shoved Cummings aside in her race into the house. "Lina!" she screamed. "Baby!"

Her husband growled and lumbered after her. "Don't try to stop!" he flung at Cummings. The latter went pale. Then, as he shrugged, the colour came back to his face. He said to Pelton,

"Would you please come inside and restrain those two? Better still, get them out of here."

Flinging her arms out and up, Mrs. Grasko emerged from her daughter's room.

"Everything there! How she could go away for days? Everything there!"

Pelton said, "Look, Mr. Cummings, tell them where your wife is and let 'em speak to her and then I'll get 'em out of here."

Cummings said, "No."

Pelton promptly said, "Then how come she didn't take anything with her?"

Cummings said she'd taken a small overnight bag.

"Liar!" shrieked old Grasko.

"Where is my baby?"

Cummings added that he hadn't said she *would* be gone for days, only that she *might* be.

The Graskos, meanwhile, were working themselves up to a near frenzy. In many ways they had always been like children, utterly unable to master the art of dissimulation. The old woman faced him now, her ugly features once again distorted in a grimace of rage and fear, her hands clawing at the air.

"What did you do with her?" she screamed. "What? What?"

And the old man, baring his yellowed stumps of teeth as if he intended to leap upon his son-in-law and bite and tear to pieces, suddenly cried, "The letter! Yes, police-man, the letter! Ask him—ask him!" And he drew an envelope from his pocket and forced it on Pelton. As the latter took it, the two old people, utterly forgetting themselves in their

frenzy, began to sob and wail loudly in their native tongue.

"Well, I never had nothing like this happen before," the deputy said uneasily. "Look, now, Cummings—" he'd already got past the stage of "Mister," Cummings noted—"this letter from your wife? Okay. Now, they claim she always wrote to them, in long-hand—"

"Always, always! Ohhhh!"

"And that she didn't know how to type."

Cummings wiped his face on his sleeve. "She burned her hand, so she asked me to type it for her."

"Look! Look! How he lies! The name, police-man—see, the name!"

Pelton pointed to the signature. "They claim this ain't her writing."

Cummings insisted that it was, only that, because of the burn, Lina had held the pen awkwardly. The deputy considered this. Then, slowly, he shook his head. "I guess you'd better tell us just exactly where you claim your wife is and let us see if we can raise her on the phone. And if we can't—" He halted, listening. The old couple ceased their noise. A car drove into the road, stopped, then drove off again. Feet approached the house.

Cummings went to the door. "Here she is now," he said.

Coming up the steps, her hair blown by the wind, Lina said, "Oh, dear . . . another quarrel with my parents?" And then, screaming and sobbing, the two old people threw themselves upon her, kissing, hugging, weeping.

"Baby, we didn't know—you're all right, Baby?"

"Lina, he wouldn't tell us—We thought—we thought—"

Cummings said, in a low voice to the deputy sheriff, "The 'baby', mind you, is twenty-three years old and has been married for over a year." Pelton shook his head and muttered his sympathy—and his regrets.

"Listen," Lina said, disengaging herself, and looking at her husband and the deputy sheriff, "I don't understand. What's this all about? Why—"

Speaking slowly and deliberately, Cummings said, "Your parents called in the sheriff because they were afraid I'd murdered you and stuffed your body down the well, or under the cellar floor."

Lina said, "What? Oh, no, they couldn't! I went over yesterday to see a friend—she called me up and asked me to—you see, not so long ago she had a nervous breakdown, and so she doesn't like to be alone, and when her husband—"

Cummings explained, "I naturally felt, under the circumstances, that I couldn't tell my parents-in-law where it was because, first, the matter is such a confidential one, and second, because they would certainly have rushed over there at once, not knowing the meaning of the word 'tact', and third—"

Suddenly it all seemed to strike Lina at once. She drew away from her moaning mother and went up to her husband. He put his arm around her. "But how could they have thought—" she began, incredulously. "How could you have dared? You actually called in the

police? You really believed—Oh!" She stared at them, aghast.

"Baby," her mother wept. "Baby, we didn't know—"

Lina shouted at her, "I'm not your baby any more! I'm a grown woman, a married woman, and I love and trust my husband! Get out of here! Take them away, Mr. Pelton, please . . . I don't want to see either of you again . . . Oh, darling," she turned to Cummings as Pelton grasped the old couple by the arms and led them away, still weeping and glancing back. "I'm so terribly sorry. How can I make it up to you?"

Aloud he said, whispering into

her ear as she clung to him, "Shh . . . forget it." To himself he answered: How? Well, by really never seeing them again—by agreeing to move far, far away . . . The troll-twins had finally accomplished what he no longer had expected to achieve on his own. They had completely alienated their daughter, they had thrown the sympathy and caution of the law entirely on his side. Because—who could say?—eventually he might tire of the woman who now clung to him. Clinging could become tiresome.

In which case, today's events would be but a useful rehearsal—a sort of prelude, as it were . . .

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THE FATAL SECRET

DANIEL WEBSTER

Daniel Webster (1782-1852) was a famous American statesman, lawyer, and orator. Perhaps the foremost orator in American history, Daniel Webster was also a legend-maker of epic proportions: his reputation as a drinker, eater, and rugged individualist was Gargantuan . . . Now, what did this brilliant lawyer and politician think of murder and the detection thereof? We have discovered an "unknown" piece by the great Daniel Webster in an anthology titled THE BOSTON BOOK, BEING SPECIMENS OF METROPOLITAN LITERATURE, published in 1850 by Ticknor, Reed, and Fields of Boston. Short as this story is (and we have changed only the punctuation), you will find in it the florid style, the grandiloquence, of the period . . . and the deep, religious conscience of Nineteenth Century New England.

AN aged man, without an enemy in the world, in his own house and in his own bed, is made the victim of a butcherly murder, for mere pay.

Deep sleep had fallen on the destined victim and on all beneath his roof. A healthful old man, to whom sleep was sweet, the first sound slumbers of the night held him in their soft but strong embrace. The assassin enters, through the window already prepared, into an unoccupied apartment. With noiseless foot he paces the lonely hall, half lighted by the moon: he winds up the ascent of the stairs, and reaches the door of the chamber. Of this, he moves the lock, by soft and continued pressure, till it turns on its hinges

without noise; and he enters, and beholds his victim before him.

The room was uncommonly open to the admission of light. The face of the innocent sleeper was turned from the murderer, and the beams of the moon, resting on the grey locks of his aged temple, showed him where to strike.

The fatal blow is given! and the victim passes, without a struggle or a motion, from the repose of sleep to the repose of death!

It is the assassin's purpose to make sure work; and he yet plies the dagger, though it was obvious that life had been destroyed by the blow of the bludgeon. He even raises the aged arm, that he may not fail in his aim at the heart,

and replaces it again over the wounds of the poniard. To finish the picture, he explores the wrist for the pulse. He feels for it, and ascertains that it beats no longer.

It is accomplished. The deed is done. He retreats, retraces his steps to the window, passes out through it as he came in, and escapes. He has done the murder—no eye has seen him, no ear has heard him. The secret is his own, and it is safe!

Ah! gentlemen, that was a dreadful mistake. Such a secret can be safe nowhere. The whole creation of God has neither nook nor corner where the guilty can bestow it and say it is safe. Not to speak of that eye which glances through all disguises, and beholds everything, as in the splendour of noon, such secrets of guilt are never safe from detection, even by men.

True it is, generally speaking, that "murder will out". True it is that Providence hath so ordained and doth so govern things, that those who break the great law of heaven, by shedding man's blood, seldom succeed in avoiding discovery. Especially, in a case exciting so much attention as this, discovery must come, and will come, sooner or later.

A thousand eyes turn at once to explore every man, everything, every circumstance, connected with the time and place; a thousand ears catch every whisper; a thousand excited minds intensely dwell on the scene, shedding all

their light, and ready to kindle the slightest circumstance into a blaze of discovery.

Meantime, the guilty soul cannot keep its own secret. It is false to itself; or rather it feels an irresistible impulse of conscience to be true to itself. It labours under its guilty possession, and knows not what to do with it. The human heart was not made for the residence of such an inhabitant. It finds itself preyed on by a torment, which it dares not acknowledge to God or man. A vulture is devouring it, and it can ask no sympathy or assistance, either from heaven or earth.

The secret which the murderer possesses soon comes to possess him; and, like the evil spirits of which we read, it overcomes him, and leads him whithersoever it will. He feels it beating at his heart, rising to his throat, and demanding disclosure. He thinks the whole world sees it in his face, reads it in his eyes, and almost hears it workings in the very silence of his thoughts. It has become his master. It betrays discretion, it breaks down his courage, it conquers his prudence.

When suspicions, from without, begin to embarrass him, and the net of circumstance to entangle him, the fatal secret struggles with still greater violence to burst forth. It must be confessed, *it will be* confessed, there is no refuge from confession but suicide, and suicide is confession.

FOR TOM'S SAKE

SHEILA KAYE-SMITH

Sheila Kaye-Smith, described as slight in build, slender, and with the most serious of grey eyes, started writing as a child and had her first book published at the age of twenty. She wrote a great deal after that auspicious beginning—novels, short stories, plays, poetry—and very often in beautiful and sometimes in masterly prose. Here is one of Sheila Kaye-Smith's short stories—a character study of Mrs. Adis, a "frail-looking woman, with a brown, hard face on which the skin had dried in innumerable small, hair-like wrinkles".

You will find this a grim, tight-lipped story that culminates in a strange mixture of pathos and horror. It is one of the author's tales of Sussex—a region which, in a literary sense, belonged as completely to Sheila Kaye-Smith as Wessex belonged to Thomas Hardy.

IN north-east Sussex a great tongue of land runs into Kent by Scotney Castle. It is a land of woods—the old hammer woods of the Sussex iron industry—and among the woods gleam the hammer-ponds, holding in their mirrors the sunsets and sunrises. Owing to the thickness of the woods—great masses of oak and beech in a dense undergrowth of hazel and chestnut and frail willow—the road that passes Mrs. Adis's cottage is dark before the twilight has crept away from the fields beyond. That night there was no twilight and no moon, only a few pricks of fire in the black sky above the trees. But what the darkness hid the silence revealed. In the absolute stillness of the night, windless and clear with the first frost of October, every sound was

distinct, intensified. The distant bark of a dog at Delmonden sounded close at hand, and the man who walked on the road could hear the echo of his own footsteps following him like a knell.

Every now and then he made an effort to go more quietly, but the roadside was a mass of brambles, and their crackling and rustling was nearly as loud as the thud of his feet on the marl. Besides, they made him go slowly, and he had no time for that.

When he came to Mrs. Adis's cottage he paused a moment. Only a small patch of grass lay between the cottage and the road; he went stealthily across and looked in at the lighted, uncurtained window. He could see Mrs. Adis stooping over the fire, taking some pot or kettle off it. He hesitated and

seemed to wonder. He was a big, hulking man, with reddish hair and freckled face, evidently of the labouring class, but not successful, judging by the vague grime and poverty of his appearance. For a moment he made as if he would open the window, then he changed his mind and went to the door instead.

He did not knock, but walked straight in. The woman at the fire turned quickly round.

"What, you, Peter Crouch?" she said. "I didn't hear you knock."

"I didn't knock, ma'am. I didn't want anybody to hear."

"How's that?"

"I'm in trouble." His hands were shaking a little.

"What you done?"

"I shot a man, Mrs. Adis."

"You?"

"Yes, I shot him."

"You killed him?"

"I dunno."

For a moment there was silence in the small stuffy kitchen. Then the kettle boiled over and Mrs. Adis sprang for it, mechanically putting it at the side of the fire.

She was a small, frail-looking woman, with a brown, hard face on which the skin had dried in innumerable small, hair-like wrinkles. She was probably not more than forty-two, but life treats some women hard in the agricultural district of Sussex, and Mrs. Adis's life had been harder than most.

"What do you want me to do for you, Peter Crouch?" she said a little sourly.

"Let me stay here a bit. Is there

nowhere you can put me till they've gone?"

"Who's they?"

"The keepers."

"Oh, you've had a shine with the keepers, have you?"

"Yes, I was down by Cinder Wood seeing if I could pick up anything, and the keepers found me. There was four to one, so I used my gun. Then I ran for it. They're after me; reckon they aren't far off now."

Mrs. Adis did not speak for a moment.

Crouch looked at her searchingly, beseechingly.

"You might do it for Tom's sake," he said.

"You haven't been an over-good friend to Tom," snapped Mrs. Adis.

"But Tom's been an unaccountable good friend to me; reckon he would want you to stand by me tonight."

"Well, I won't say he wouldn't, seeing as Tom always thought better of you than you deserved. Maybe you can stay till he comes home tonight, then we can hear what he says about it."

"That'll serve my turn, I reckon. He'll be up in Ironlatch for an hour yet, and the coast will be clear by then. I can get away out of the country."

"Where'll you go?"

"I dunno. There's time to think of that."

"Well, you can think of it in here," she said drily, opening a door which led from the kitchen into the small lean-to of the cottage. "They'll never guess you're

there, 'specially if I tell them I ain't seen you tonight."

"You're a good woman, Mrs. Adis. I know I'm not worth your standing by me, but maybe I'd have been different if I'd had a mother like Tom's."

She did not speak, but shut the door, and he was in darkness save for a small ray of light that filtered through one of the cracks. By this light he could see her moving to and fro, preparing Tom's supper. In another hour Tom would be home from Ironlatch Farm, where he worked every day. Peter Crouch trusted Tom not to revoke his mother's kindness, for they had been friends when they went together to the National School at Lamberhurst, and since then the friendship had not been broken by their very different characters and careers.

Peter Crouch hunched down upon the sacks that filled one corner of the lean-to and gave himself up to the dreary and anxious game of waiting. A delicious smell of cooking began to filter through from the kitchen, and he hoped Mrs. Adis would not deny him a share of the supper when Tom came home, for he was very hungry and he had a long way to go.

He had fallen into a kind of helpless doze, haunted by the memories of the last two hours, recast in the form of dreams, when he was roused by the sound of footsteps on the road.

For a moment his heart nearly choked him with its beating. They were the keepers. They had guessed for a cert. where he was

—with Mrs. Adis, his old pal's mother. He had been a fool to come to the cottage. Nearly losing his self-control, he shrank into the corner shivering, half-sobbing. But the footsteps went by. They did not even hesitate at the door. He heard them ring away into the frosty stillness. The next minute Mrs. Adis stuck her head into the lean-to.

"That was them," she said, shortly; "a party from the castle. I saw them go by. They had lanterns, and I saw old Manders and the two Boormans. Maybe it 'ud be better if you slipped out now and went towards Cansiron. You'd miss them that way and get over to Kent. There's a London train comes from Tunbridge Wells at 10 tonight."

"That'd be a fine thing for me, ma'am, but I haven't the price of a ticket on me."

She went to one of the kitchen drawers. "Here's seven shillin'; it'll be your fare to London and a bit over."

For a moment he did not speak, then he said, "I don't know how to thank you, ma'am."

"Oh, you needn't thank me. I am doing it for Tom. I know how unaccountable set he is on you and always was."

"I hope you won't get into trouble because of this."

"There ain't much fear. No one's ever likely to know you've been in this cottage. That's why I'd sooner you went before Tom came back, for maybe he'd bring a pal with him, and that'd make trouble. I won't say I shan't have it on my conscience for having helped you

to escape the law, but shooting a keeper ain't the same as shooting an ordinary sort of man, as we all know, so I won't think no more about it."

She opened the door for him, but on the threshold they both stood still, for again footsteps could be heard approaching, this time from the far south.

"Maybe it's Tom," said Mrs. Adis.

"There's more than one man there, and I can hear voices."

"You'd better go back," she said shortly. "Wait till they've passed, anyway."

With an unwilling shrug he went back into the little dusty lean-to, which he had come to hate, and she shut the door after him.

The footsteps drew nearer. They came more slowly and heavily this time. For a moment he thought they would pass also, but their momentary dulling was only the crossing of the strip of grass outside the door. The next minute there was a knock.

Trembling with anxiety and curiosity, Peter Crouch put his eye to one of the numerous cracks in the lean-to door and looked through into the kitchen. He saw Mrs. Adis go to the cottage door, but before she could open it a man came quickly in and shut it behind him.

Crouch recognised Vidler, one of the keepers of Scotney Castle, and he felt his hands and feet grow leaden cold. They knew where he was then. They had followed him. They had guessed that he had taken refuge with Mrs. Adis. It was all up. He was not really

hidden; there was no place for him to hide. Directly they opened the inner door they would see him. Why couldn't he think of things better? Why wasn't he cleverer at looking after himself—like other men? His legs suddenly refused to support him, and he sat down on the pile of sacks.

The man in the kitchen seemed to have some difficulty in saying what he wanted to Mrs. Adis. He stood before her silently, nervously twisting his cap.

"Well, what is it?" she asked.

"I want to speak to you, ma'am."

Peter Crouch listened, straining his ears, for his thudding heart nearly drowned the voices in the next room. Oh, no, he was sure she would not give him away. If only for Tom's sake. . . . She was a game sort, Mrs. Adis.

"Well?" she said sharply, as the man remained tongue-tied.

"I have brought you bad news, Mrs. Adis."

Her expression changed.

"What? It ain't Tom, is it?"

"He's outside," said the keeper.

"What do you mean?" said Mrs. Adis, and she moved towards the door.

"Don't ma'am. Not till I've told you."

"Told me what? Oh, be quick, man, for mercy's sake," and she tried to push past him to the door.

"There's been a row," he said, "down by Cinder Wood. There was a chap there snaring rabbits, and Tom was walking with the Boormans and me and old Manders from the Castle. We heard a noise in the Eighteen-pounder

Spinney, and there. . . . It was too dark to see who it was, and directly he saw us he made off—but we'd scared him first, and he let fly with his gun. . . ."

He stopped speaking and looked at her, as if beseeching her to fill in the gaps of his story. In his corner of the lean-to Peter Crouch was a man of wood and sawdust.

"Tom——" said Mrs. Adis.

The keeper had forgotten his guard, and before he could prevent her she had flung open the door.

The men outside had evidently been waiting for the signal, and they came in, carrying something which they put down in the middle of the kitchen floor.

"Is he dead?" asked Mrs. Adis, without tears.

The men nodded. They could not find a dry voice like hers.

In the lean-to Peter Crouch had ceased to sweat and tremble. Strength had come with despair, for he knew he must despair now. Besides, he no longer wanted to escape from this thing that he had done. Oh, Tom!—and I was thinking it was one of them demmed keepers. Oh, Tom; and it was you that got it—got it from me! Reckon I don't want to live!

And yet life was sweet, for there was a woman at Ticehurst, a woman as staunch to him as Tom, who would go with him to the world's end even now. But he must not think of her. He had no right; his life was forfeit to Mrs. Adis.

She was sitting in the old basket armchair by the fire. One of the men had helped her into it. Another man with rough kindness

had poured out something from a flask he carried in his pocket. "Here, ma'am, take a drop of this. It'll give you strength."

"We'll go round to Ironlatch Cottage and ask Mrs. Gain to come down to you."

"Reckon this is a turble thing to have come to you, but it's the will o' Providence, as some folks say; and as for the man who did it—we've a middling good guess who he is, and he shall swing."

"We didn't see his face, but we've got his gun. He threw it into an alder when he bolted, and I swear that gun belongs to Peter Crouch, who's been up to no good since the day when Mus' Scales sacked him for stealing his corn."

"Reckon, tho', he didn't know it was Tom when he did it—he and Tom always being better friends than he deserved."

Peter Crouch was standing upright now, looking through the crack of the door. He saw Mrs. Adis struggle to her feet and stand by the table looking down on the dead man's face. A whole eternity seemed to roll by as she stood there. He saw her put her hand into her apron pocket, where she had thrust the key of the lean-to.

"The Boormans have gone after Crouch," said Vidler, nervously breaking the silence. "They'd a notion he'd broken through the woods Ironlatch way. There's no chance of his having been by here? You haven't seen him tonight, ma'am?"

There was a pause.

"No," said Mrs. Adis. "I haven't seen him. Not since Tues-

day." She took her hand out of her apron pocket.

"Well, we'll be getting around and fetch Mrs. Gain. Reckon you'd be glad to have her." Mrs. Adis nodded.

"Will you carry him in there first?" and she pointed to the bedroom door.

The men picked up the body and carried it into the next room. Then silently each wrung the mother by the hand and went away.

She waited until they had shut

the door, then she came towards the lean-to. Crouch once more fell a-shivering. He couldn't bear it. No, he'd swing rather than face Mrs. Adis. He heard the key turn, and he nearly screamed.

But she did not come in. She merely unlocked the door, then crossed the kitchen with a heavy dragging footstep and shut herself into the room where Tom was.

Peter Crouch knew what he must do—the only thing she wanted him to do, the only thing he could possibly do. He opened the door and silently went out.



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